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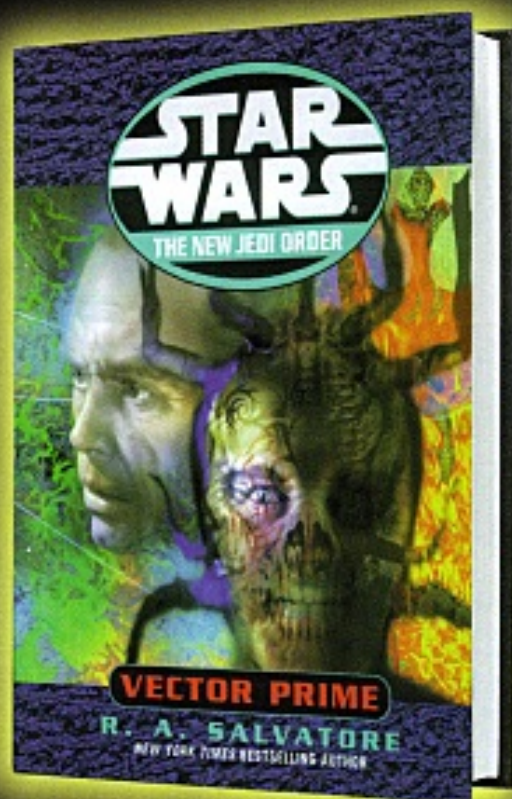


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Episode I of the *Star Wars* saga opened to blockbuster business in May, and the *Insider* was there (who wasn't?), with scene reports from fans across the nation, plus reactions from Liam Neeson, Natalie Portman, Sam Jackson, and other stars after their first screenings!

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64 Star Wars Celebration!

It was three days of non-stop *Star Wars*, as 30,000 fans joined stars like Anthony Daniels, Roy Park, Ahmed Best, Warwick Davis, Hugh Quarshie, Pernilla August, and Rick McCallum for the *Star Wars* Celebration in Denver, Colorado. Kevin Fitzpatrick goes into the trenches to bring you the whole story, from the rain and mud to the stars and sun—plus the Jar Jar Jam and a few words from festival no-show Brion Blessed. The party starts here!

CORRECTION Due to a printer's error, the cover of our last issue was numbered incorrectly. The correct issue number for our previous issue was *Star Wars Insider* #44.

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was also delayed to make room for Episode I and Celebration coverage, but will return next issue with Michael Sheard, *Empire's* Admiral Ozzel...

SCOUTING THE GALAXY

returns next issue with more answers from Star Wars collecting expert Steve Sansweet. In the meantime, you can continue to mail your questions about collecting to: **SCOUTING THE GALAXY**, P.O. Box 2898, Petaluma, CA 94953-2898

STAR WARS BOOKSHELF

will also return next issue, rotating with our comics column, and will next feature an interview with Vector Prime author R.A. Salvatore!

THE WONDER COLUMN

is still taking that oil bath, but Anthony Daniels will be back...



ON THE COVER We liked these two covers so much, we decided to use both! Newsstand editions will feature the Naboo battle scene, while subscriber copies feature bounty hunter Aurra Sing, seen briefly in *The Phantom Menace*.

Illustration by Russ Kiser



from the editor's desk

THE CULT OF STAR WARS?

ONCE EVERY COUPLE OF YEARS, *Star Wars* breaks onto the radar of mainstream media. This year *Star Wars* not only broke onto the radar—it seemed to block out the sun for a few weeks as newspaper, magazine, and on-line editors across the country lit a fire under their writers to fill pages up with as much *Star Wars* content as possible. At one point, I was getting a dozen calls a day from reporters trying to come to terms with the "*Star Wars* phenomenon," desperate for any quotes to help beef up their copy.

At this point you'll have to forgive me being snide. I have to admit that after dozens of interviews, many asking the same questions over and over, I'm getting a bit cynical about writers looking to write the end-all, be-all piece on *Star Wars*. Sure, there were many great, insightful articles written in the past few months about *Star Wars*, its creator, its fans, and its cultural impact—but there were also just as many things I've read that were openly, and I believe unfairly, derisive of *Star Wars* and its fans.

To be fair, I don't believe *Star Wars* is above criticism. Is anything? Still, I don't think *Star Wars* is anywhere near deserving of some of the condescending things I'm seeing written out there.

My biggest beef is people calling *Star Wars* fans a "cult." Does that make me a cult leader for editing this magazine? PUHLEEZE! George Lucas does not ask us all to wear the same clothes and send him half our earnings. What boggles my mind is how *Star Wars* fans somehow qualify as a cult for waiting days in line to see a movie and buying lots of action figures, but other people doing similar activities in other areas of our society do not. Are football fans who wait days in line for tickets and wear big blocks of cheese on their heads a cult? Are Garth Brooks fans who line up to buy his new record at midnight a cult? Is a Princess Diana enthusiast who buys \$500 dollar porcelain sculptures of her part of a cult? No, no, and no. And neither are *Star Wars* fans, who are just having fun, participating in a hobby, and don't need judgments placed upon them just because they aren't engaging in more time-honored fandoms like sports, music, and royalty-watching.

My next biggest beef is hearing some variation on this theme: "George Lucas crippled the movie industry by making big budget effects movies so popular that Hollywood would no longer make non-formulaic adult movies that accept a modest return for art's sake." Only a simpleton could believe that argument. That's like blaming

food for a population explosion. Any fool who thinks film executives ever accepted a "modest return" is kidding themselves. The movie industry has wanted to make as much money as it could from the day it started. *Star Wars* did not change that—nor did it stop "art films" from being made. In fact, there are more American independent films being made today than there have been at any other point in film this century—and many of them are being made by filmmakers who were inspired to go into movie-making by growing up on *Star Wars*. People forget that Episode I is essentially the biggest independent film ever made—it is completely self-financed by George Lucas.

The last beef is more of a plea. PLEASE don't anyone ever ask me, "Why is *Star Wars* so popular?" ever again. This is mostly to protect myself from coming up with another lame, stupid answer. I've been asked this so many times it makes my head spin and each time I grapple for a new answer that turns out more weak than the previous one. I've come to the conclusion that if you don't understand what the appeal of *Star Wars* is at this point, there is really no way to explain it to you in words. The only thing that works is getting into a crowded theater with a big audience that is rip-roaring and ready to see the film.

I hope the past couple months have been fun for you now that *Star Wars* is back on the radar. I trust that everyone has had a couple opportunities to get into that crowded theater with a big audience. This issue is primarily about the excitement of having Episode I finally open—we've got scene reports from around the country and lots of coverage of the *Star Wars* Celebration.

But as we look back at the excitement of May, let's not lose sight of the fact that now is our time—we are still smack-dab in the middle of a *Star Wars* summer, with two more yet to come. And for those who feel safer and more "cool" by turning up their noses at the *Star Wars* "cult," I can only feel sad that they have cheated themselves out of the fun and camaraderie that comes from true *Star Wars* fandom. For their sakes, let's hope they wise up by Episode II; and if not, hey—more seats for us!

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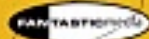
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rebel rumblings

Fans Feel the Force of Phantom

WITH EPISODE I finally in theaters, the Insider was deluged with mail from fans reacting to The Phantom Menace. This "Rebel Rumblings" is dedicated entirely to your responses to Episode I and the Star Wars Celebration.

It's not that we don't have stacks of other mail to get to (including many letters responding to the Internet "spoilers" debate), but that'll all have to wait until Insider #46—after all, the release of the first new Star Wars movie in a generation is a pretty monumental event, wouldn't you agree? I wish we could include all the letters we got—as it is, I could only use a fraction of the letters we received, and even then edited them considerably for length to get as many of you in as possible (I'll keep my usually verbose responses to a minimum).

I made every effort to get all opinions represented, but to tell you the truth we didn't receive many negative letters about Episode I at all. Don't get me wrong—I know there are people out there who didn't like it, they just didn't write us. We are a fan magazine after all, so why would they? For the record, and since there's no "From the Managing Editor's Desk" column, I love Episode I more every time I see it, and I've been in Star Wars nirvana all summer. Now for your opinions:

I JUST SAW *The Phantom Menace*. WOW!! That was the best movie I've ever seen! I just loved it in the beginning, everyone sitting in apprehension for the previews to end, then hearing everyone applaud as Lucasfilm Ltd. came onto the screen. Then silence filled the theater until the very familiar, "A long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away...." The crowd went wild! The almost tangible excitement in the air before the movie felt great! I also like the way Mr. Lucas used modern technology to further the story, not over-power it like some movies do. I felt it was a perfect use of technology in a movie.

Like most people, there were a few things that I didn't really like. I thought Mr. Lucas should have given Darth Maul a few more lines. I also didn't like what happened to Darth Maul in the end. But this is Mr. Lucas' creation, and if this is the way he wanted it, then that's how it is. I really love the way Mr. Lucas did this

movie—it ties in so well with the first trilogy. I can already see the ground-work for the Empire being laid. This has to be the best movie of the year! I can't wait for Episode II!

SAM MERRILL
Mill Air Force Base, UT

THE MOVIE WAS STUNNING!

The cities were amazing—I never dreamed of how incredible Coruscant could be. The starships and Podracers were excellent. The lightsaber duels were breathtaking—I was on the edge of my seat the entire time. Most importantly, everyone in the theater was sharing something that has almost vanished from our world: unity. We all crave a place where there are heroes to squash out the bad guys, and where bad guys are clearly defined. *Star Wars* will always be that place, and I know that people will be visiting it for many more years to come to experience what I felt on May 19.

STEPHANIE E. MURDOUGH
Manchester, NH

THE EUPHORIA

surrounding the Chinese Theater as show time got closer was amazing. As the line began to move, a cheer erupted. I had never been in such an enthusiastic group of fans before. As the lights dimmed and the curtain was pulled aside, a deafening cheer arose from the crowd. The familiar fanfare began to play, and a roar that shook the theater itself boomed through the crowd. It was amazing. It sent shivers up my spine, and the movie had only just started.

There were more cheers as each character entered, and a hiss as Maul was seen for the first time, silence as Qui-Gon fell to his death, and another cheer as Obi-Wan took his revenge. This movie took us on an emotional roller coaster that I had not felt since *Return of the Jedi*.

TAMMY OLSEN Burbank, CA

I SAW EPISODE I on opening day and loved it! It was spectacular! The performances of the actors were superb! Jake Lloyd was very charming and surprisingly mature beyond

his years. I loved the way R2-D2 and C-3PO were integrated into the film, and Ewan McGregor was great as the young Obi-Wan. Senator Palpatine was fascinating—he makes the perfect bad guy. You'd never know if he's good or bad if you hadn't seen Episodes IV, V, and VI—of course, who does that leave? The lightsaber battles with the battle droids and Darth Maul were amazing! The energy and expert swordsmanship surpassed all my expectations! It's hard to believe there are now FOUR *Star Wars* films—and two more on the way!

One thing I was disturbed by, though, was the reliance on CG animation. Jar Jar Binks was definitely a funny and well-developed character, but every time he came on screen (the same with the other Gungans, especially Boss Nass), the sense of reality George Lucas creates in the *Star Wars* films was shaken. Live actors give so much more believability to a character—note the differences between Jabba in *Return of the Jedi* and the *Star Wars* Special Edition.

LEAH SPRAGGE Livermore, CA

WHAT A WONDERFUL MOVIE.

George Lucas' prequel was marvelous. I was utterly blown away. The whole cast was spectacular. The special effects were stupendous—if I hadn't known that Jar Jar Binks was a computer generated image, I would have been fooled. Thank you, George Lucas—Episode I was right in step with the existing *Star Wars* films. Wow!

ETHAN JENNINGS Lynden, WA

I'M IN AWE! I just came back from seeing Episode I and it was so incredible! I loved all the characters! My favorites were Queen Amidala, Anakin, Jar Jar, Darth Maul, Obi-Wan, and, of course, Qui-Gon Jinn. I don't have a favorite scene—I loved them all. But I do have to tell you one thing: the Podrace scene was really cool. All throughout it, I was thinking, "Go, Annie, go!" But in the middle of the scene, the little kid behind

» CONTINUED ON PAGE 79

wanna rumble?

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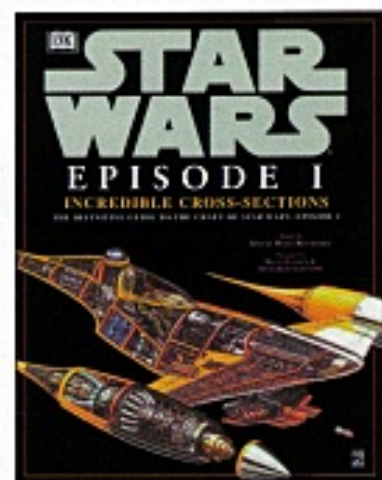
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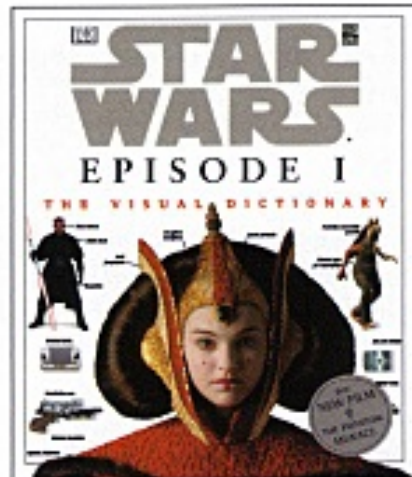


by David West Reynolds

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This summer the Force is with



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THE PREQUEL HAS LANDED

»FROM COAST TO COAST, FANS TURN OUT FOR OPENING NIGHT OF *THE PHANTOM MENACE*

STORMTROOPERS FLOODED THE STREETS and lightsabers clashed on sidewalks. Ewoks and Jawas mingled freely, as bounty hunters and Jedi Knights eagerly exchanged hugs and high-fives. Leia was confronted for the first time with Amidala, and Fett met Maul in a match of costumed fury. All around them, families, friends, and fans from all walks of life milled around movie theaters excitedly, their faces registering a combination of disbelief and euphoria. Our moment had finally arrived.

It was Wednesday, May 19, 1999, and *Star Wars: Episode I The Phantom Menace* was here.

Or rather, for many, it was the night of May 18, as theaters across the U.S. and Canada began screening Episode I at midnight—the moment the 19th arrived—necessitating Tuesday night line-ups for the first new *Star Wars* movie since *Return of the Jedi* in 1983. And as with *Jedi*, as well as *Empire* before and the Special Edition after, the opening of the newest Episode in the saga of the Skywalker family was a cause for celebration, and a time when fans could experience *Star Wars* together like no other.

—Scott Chernoff

NEW *YORK *CITY

»BLOW-OUT IN THE BIG APPLE

by Kevin Fitzpatrick

NEW YORK—In the city that never sleeps, neither did *Star Wars* fans hungry for Episode I to open.

Throughout the five boroughs of New York City, the mood was as festive as if the Yankees and Mets were playing the World Series on May 19. It was a party on the sidewalks and subways as fans poured into city

movie houses from Harlem to Coney Island for the latest installment in the *Star Wars* saga.

Among the six theaters in Manhattan showing *The Phantom Menace*, ground zero for fandom was Clearview's Ziegfeld Theater on 54th street. A crowd of more than 3,000—some on hand since May 1—stood in pouring rain for the doors to open.

The mood was as festive as a street fair. Fans dressed as stormtroopers stopped taxis. The Sci-Fi Channel parked a truck and held trivia contests with hostess Sarah Moon.

Even waitresses from a nearby Hooters restaurant handed out chicken wings to people in line. Eight satellite TV trucks sat on Sixth Avenue. More than 40 television crews, some from as far away as London and Tokyo, conducted interviews on the street.

Of course, it would not be a *Star Wars* opening without costumed fans. The most popular New York City costumes were those of the Jedi Knights. A few Yodas and Darth Mauls also made the scene, and a number of Queen Amidalas as well. Lightsabers flashed in the night.

"I'm actually really excited about the crowd," said Kristal Kunzer, waiting to enter the very first 12:01 a.m. show. "I think that's what's going to make the movie even better, all the energy and all the excitement. It's going to rock."

Inside the theater, one could feel the anticipation in the crowd. Boisterous cheers and sustained applause filled the room. When the main title crawl came up, the roof was nearly lifted off.

After the show, fan reaction was overwhelmingly positive. "I'm not sure what part was my favorite," offered T.J. Russo of Paramus, N.J. "It would probably be the end. The



Podracing was so cool. And it was even cooler when Anakin was actually inside the droid control ship. My favorite character was a two-way draw between Anakin and Jar Jar."

Fans throughout the day discovered things they didn't know before, such as, "Just the Jedi being a little more infallible," marveled Jim "DJ Small Change" Dier of New Jersey.

"I've just come out of my fourth showing and I have three more in the next three days," confessed Jamey Shafer of Manhattan. "I'll probably see it eight times in the next two weeks. I've got all these theories about midi-chlorians and how they relate to the Jedi and the Sith. I'm starting to speculate a lot about things, including the Jedi Council."

Fans now have three years to speculate about *The Phantom Menace* before the lines form for Episode II in May, 2002.

LOS*ANGELES

» **THE MILLENNIUM FALCON HAS LANDED**
by Scott Chernoff

LOS ANGELES—Southern California was the center of *Phantom* fandom this spring, as thousands turned out across the region for midnight showings of *Star Wars: Episode I The Phantom Menace*, and dozens more maintained lines for up to a staggering six weeks before the movie's May 19 release.

"I feel so special to be here," Rachel Ramras, 24, said as she waited outside Los

ALL WEEKEND, THERE WERE FANS COSTUMED AS JEDI AND BOUNTY HUNTERS, WITH A STRONG SHOW OF FORCE FOR DARTH MAUL AND QUEEN AMIDALA—CLEARLY, THE EARLY FAVORITES OF COSTUME-LOVING FANS —LOS ANGELES

Feliz's Vista Theater where Hollywood Boulevard meets Sunset Boulevard two hours before the 12:01 a.m. show on opening night. "How many movies in 20 years are you going to be able to look back on and remember where you saw it and who you saw it with, and what

you were doing that day? It's not just going to be a movie—it's an event."

Nowhere was that more true than at the two theaters where fans began spontaneously starting lines in early April, Westwood's Mann Village Theater, and Mann's historic Chinese

NEW*YORK*CITY*CHARITY*SCREENING

» **FANS AND FAMOUS FLIP FOR PHANTOM MENACE** by Pete Fletzer

NEW YORK—Scores of New York City police officers blocked off Times Square as fans struggled for a glimpse of the rich and famous who turned out to see *The Phantom Menace* at one of 11 charity premieres held around the United States and Canada on Sunday, May 16th—three days before the film's general release. Tickets ranged in price from \$500 to \$2,500 for the Loews Astor Plaza screening that raised nearly \$1 million for the Aubrey Fund For Pediatric Cancer Research and the Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center.

Phantom Menace stars Liam Neeson, Natalie Portman, Frank Oz and Ahmed Best were joined by a brigade of celebrity fans that included Glenn Close, Kevin Spacey, Barbara Walters and New York Governor George Pataki. The Backstreet Boys drew screams of adoration from the young star-gazers as did vampire slayer Sarah Michelle Gellar.

But it was more than a celebrity happening: an army of die-hard fans was there as well. Like Ken Jonach, an office manager from Short Hills, New Jersey, who was still recovering from the Denver *Star Wars* Celebration two weeks earlier. "It still hasn't sunk in yet," Ken said after the screening. "I've waited 16 years for this movie and it was well worth it."

Following the film, fans and celebrities walked the seven blocks down Broadway to Mars 2112, the sci-fi themed restaurant that played host to the post-premiere party on the sunny Sunday afternoon. The crowd was met by strange creatures and press alike as they walked down the red carpet to the gala. "The kids will love it," actor John Leguizamo offered, and Ahmed Best slyly gushed, "Who was that Jar Jar guy? He was great!"

Newly converted *Star Wars* fan Lydia Nienart summed up the day's events after the reception. "The movie was spectacular, the party was a lot of fun, and it was all for a great cause," she said, adding, "I can't wait to see *The Phantom Menace* again!"

OPPOSITE: Episode I takes over the marquee at the corner of Sunset & Hollywood at L.A.'s historic Vista Theater. TOP: Stormtroopers meet their earthly counterparts in the NYPD—and end up hailing a cab—in New York City, where fans cheer at Clearview's Zigfield Theater.

Theater in Hollywood. The Chinese long-term line-dwellers collected donations to benefit the Starlight Foundation, which benefits seriously ill children.

Most Los Angeles theaters began playing Episode I at midnight on May 19 and kept it going round the clock. Inside theaters, fans were giddy with enthusiasm. At one showing at the Chinese, one Yoda-masked fan dueling another fan disguised as Darth Vader, with the battle climaxing when "Yoda" vanquished "Vader" by triumphantly holding the Vader helmet high aloft his lightsaber to huge applause. All weekend, there were fans costumed as Jedi and bounty hunters, with a strong show of Force for Darth Maul and Queen Amidala—clearly, the early favorites of costume-loving fans.

The scene inside the theaters often took on a party atmosphere, and at the Chinese, fans tossed a huge beach ball throughout the auditorium before an usher ushered the ball out. Many fans hugged and cheered spontaneously. But others just sat back and watched, still soaking it in. "It's all slowly crystallizing to me," fan Jon Anderle, 28, said at the Vista. "It's all becoming a clear picture that this is actually

happening and I'm going to be seeing the new Star Wars film."

But if Anderle didn't believe it, he sure did when the lights came down and the Fox fanfare sounded. At every showing the *insider* caught in L.A. opening weekend (and that's five, for those of you who are keeping score), fans cheered thunderously and mightily for the fanfare, the famous "A long time ago" title card, the opening crawl, and the appearance of Obi-Wan and Qui-Gon. Not a few tears were shed.

THE ROAR OF THE CROWD AND THE WAVING OF THE LIGHTSABERS

CAME TO A SCREECHING HALT WHEN STAR WARS PRODUCER RICK

McCALLUM STRODE TO THE FRONT OF THE AUDIENCE AND SPOKE

FOR A FEW MINUTES BEFORE THE FILM BEGAN. — SAN FRANCISCO

Cheers also greeted the appearances of familiar characters like Artoo and Threepio, as well as Obi-Wan's victory over Darth Maul and other thrilling moments.

But something funny started happening with the cheers, too: by Sunday, audiences were cheering not only the entrances of old friends like Obi-Wan and the droids, but also new ones like Anakin and Amidala, and even Watto. Clearly, this movie had already taken hold, and repeat viewers were finding a lot to love in the new characters.

Fans reacted all weekend with glee. "I loved it," Jennifer Burns, 27, exclaimed after the midnight show at the Vista. "It was as much fun

as I thought it would be, and it lived up to all my expectations. I liked the story—it was complicated, but it was cool."

Justin Gombert, 13, saw Episode I twice opening weekend, getting special permission to leave school early on May 19 to see the movie. "It was worth missing school to be there," Justin said. "There was a guy dressed up as Darth Sidious, and a fake lightsaber battle—you could tell they were all hardcore." The young fan named both Sith Lords, Darth Maul and Darth Sidious, as his favorite characters. "Darth Maul is really cool because he doesn't stop," Justin said. "Even Darth Vader seemed to have a weak spot."

On Sunday, Justin brought sister Jordyn Gombert, 9, who also loved the movie, declaring Anakin to be her favorite character. "I thought the whole movie was great," Jordyn said. "My favorite part was when Anakin was riding in the ship at the end, and he said, 'Whoops,' and when he said, 'Qui-Gon told me to stay in this cockpit.'"

Fans' first reactions often focused on the lightsaber battle and the Podrace sequence, which Christian Duguay, 29, called "probably one of the most intense things I've ever seen in my life." Duguay added, "The lightsaber battle at the end was probably my other favorite scene—it was incredibly creative."

Rachel Ramras agreed. "I loved it," she beamed. "It was the first Star Wars movie I've ever seen on the big screen and it exceeded my expectations!"

MODESTO

» HOME TOWN BOY MAKES GOOD by Joanne Estrada

MODESTO, CA—George Lucas' hometown turned out en masse for the premiere of *Star Wars*: Episode I *The Phantom Menace* in Modesto, California. More than 1,800 fans—better than one per-



Philip Sharp's transformation into a Darth Maul look-alike.

cent of the city's population—waited for the midnight showings, with the line for the first show wrapping around the downtown Modesto streets that Lucas cruised as a teenager and later immortalized in his film *American Graffiti*.

Hundreds donned costumes, from Jedi robes and Royal Guard capes to Rodian masks and Queen Amidala lips. There were mock lightsabers everywhere as the good-natured crowd

swapped stories about Lucas and the galactic impact he's had on their lives.

"This is the social event of the decade!" insisted 19-year-old Adam LaRosa of Modesto, who got in line three days before the first showing. He passed the hours sitting in a blow-up Darth Maul chair. "It's worth it," he said, adding, "Dude, did you know Lucas went to my high school, Downey High?"

Further back in line was Obi-Wan Kenobi look-alike Nathan Barnes, 18, who spent more than an hour transforming the head of his friend Philip Sharp, 16, into Darth Maul, complete with horns. The crowd watched and cheered as the Sith Lord triumphantly fired up his double-sided lightsaber.

After the show, the fans were still exultant. "It was totally awesome," exclaimed Kathy Rau, 37, who claimed to have been the first person in line 22 years ago for the Modesto premiere of the original *Star Wars*. "There were more lightsaber fights [in *Phantom Menace*], which is what I like. It was full of action. I was not disappointed!"



photo: Kevin Koppert



photo: Meagan Kelly



photo: Lee Diekemper

SAN FRANCISCO

»WORTH THE WAIT BY THE GOLDEN GATE
by Daniel Stein

SAN FRANCISCO—Lightsaber battles, news crews, documentary film-makers, sponsors, Web cams, cops, costumes, drama and even an appearance by producer Rick McCallum—the UA Coronet Theater in San Francisco was the place to be for the opening of *Star Wars: Episode I The Phantom Menace* on May 19.

Two groups of fans, calling themselves Countingdown and the Fraternal Order of Bounty Hunters, had been waiting over three weeks for tickets and good seats to the midnight show. The Countingdown group took on the mammoth task of organizing a "Star Wars Theater" event, a costume contest, a raffle, sponsorships and a Webcast. Proceeds from all events went to the Starlight Foundation, which benefits seriously ill children.

Most of the fans were between 20 and 30, but the overall range was anywhere from 3 to 73. Costumes were everywhere and very well done. The contest winners, dressed as Darth Maul and Queen Amidala, were especially impressive.

Traditional, single-bladed lightsabers were the weapon of choice for most fans. A section of the parking lot was roped off as a battle arena, with the only injuries of the night befalling a few Darth Maul double-sided

lightsabers, which tended to break under heavy combat—or was it just the power of the Force?

Once inside (it took a full hour to get the entire audience of 1,200 into the theater for the midnight show), fans were rewarded with an unexpected treat. The roar of the crowd and the waving of the lightsabers came to a screeching halt when *Star Wars* producer Rick McCallum strode to the front of the audience and spoke for a few minutes before the film began. He closed by introducing a couple in the audience—a fan named Chris, who, before the entire audience, asked his girlfriend to marry him. She accepted his proposal to the overpowering cheers of their fellow *Star Wars* fans and a beaming Rick McCallum.

Five minutes later, the movie started, to thunderous applause. A little over two hours later, fans emerged energized and happy. "The critics do not know what they are talking about," was the general consensus quote from the crowds exiting the theater. "I can't wait to see it again," and "I am getting right back in line for the 3 a.m. show," were other consistent sound bites from the Force-ful opening of *The Phantom Menace*.

FLORIDA

»FESTIVE FANS FEEL THE FORCE
by Lee Diekemper

ST. PETERSBURG, FL—They came from far, far

away as well as just a few blocks for the 12:01 a.m. premiere of *Star Wars: Episode I The Phantom Menace* at Crossroads Theater in St. Petersburg, Florida. Lightsabers lit up the night sky while fans decked out in Darth Maul garb communicated with civilians.

Clarence DeSilva, 39, of Toronto, Canada, waited patiently for the doors to open, but talked about *Star Wars* with the energy and excitement of a hyper teenager.

"Oh, man I, remember when *Star Wars* first came out—I was in high school," DeSilva recalled. "When I heard *The Phantom Menace* was going to premiere, I knew I would be down here. Last week, I just happened to notice Crossroads was selling tickets for the premiere. I drove by, and got lucky."

Sal Piccolo, 18, of Sarasota, about 40 miles south of St. Petersburg, took turns battling his friends Jillian Cardoza, 17, of St. Petersburg and Yehudah Petscher, 18, of the suburb Seminole, in impromptu lightsaber duels. Petscher was the target of many fans' desire to start a lightsaber fight, since he was disguised as Darth Maul.

"I came here with my friends to camp out for tickets last week," said Piccolo, who roughed it with Cardoza and Petscher and waited in line for nearly 16 hours for tickets. "Yeah, I guess I could have seen the movie a lot closer to home," the fan said, "but I wanted to experience it with my friends."

SEATTLE

»GEEK FLAGS FLY
by Meagan Kelso

SEATTLE—When I got to the newly renovated, palatial Cinerama Theater for the 4 p.m. showing of *Star Wars*, it was 2:30 and the line was already about a block-and-a-half long. It was a sunny afternoon and most of the people there were early- to mid-30s working stiffs like me, all flying the geek flag proudly. There were very few costumed fans in line, but the most notable were a Queen Amidala and a Darth Maul taking marriage vows! In the lobby after the movie, another enthusiast expressed my sentiments exactly: "Why'd they kill Darth Maul? He was so cool!" ☺

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Queen Amidala was a popular choice for fans who decided to costume themselves for opening night in New York City; a weary Yoda fan in Seattle takes a cat nap—or is it Jedi meditation?; in Florida, fans tested their mettle with Yehudah Petscher, the sunshine state's very own Dark Lord of the Sith.

SHOW OF FORCE

by Scott Chernoff

» THE PHANTOM MENACE BLASTS OFF INTO BOX OFFICE HYPERSPACE

EPISODE I WENT STRAIGHT TO #1 ON THE BOX OFFICE CHARTS, when *Star Wars: Episode I The Phantom Menace* opened Wednesday, May 19 with the biggest one-day take in movie history, rocketing past *The Matrix* to become the top-grossing film of 1999 so far in an astounding 9 days. At presstime, after just one month in wide release throughout the U.S. and Canada, during which it became the fastest film ever to reach \$300 million, *The Phantom Menace's* growing box-office take stood at a mind-boggling \$385 million, making it the fourth highest-grossing film of all time—surpassing even *The Empire Strikes Back* (#10) and *Return of the Jedi* (#8)—and still climbing.

On opening day, fans lined up around the nation, selling out moviehouses from coast to coast to earn *The Phantom Menace* the highest single-day gross of all time, \$28.5 million at 2,970 theaters, topping *The Lost World's* \$26.1 million record from 1997. And that was just Wednesday.

"There's never been this high a demand for a Wednesday opening film," AMC Theaters president Richie Fay told *Daily Variety*.

The demand did not diminish. With a weekend take of nearly \$64.8 million (the highest Friday-Sunday weekend gross ever), Episode I emerged from its first five days with a stratospheric \$105.7 million—becoming the fastest film ever to make \$100 million.

Star Wars' second weekend in theaters was the three-day Memorial Day weekend, and families came out in force, adding to Episode I's dizzying array of broken records. This time, with the highest-grossing second weekend ever—a four-

day total of \$66.9 million for the weekend—Episode I ended the weekend with a whopping \$207.1 million. That made it the fastest film ever to top \$200 million—making it to the milestone in just 13 days, eight days faster than *Independence Day* in 1996.

As Qui-Gon Jinn says, "There's always a bigger fish."

Star Wars topped the box office its third weekend too, adding another \$32.9 million for a then-total \$255.8 million, and setting another record: fastest film to make \$250 million, taking just 19 days compared with *Titanic's* 36 days in 1997. The film also later topped *Titanic's* record of fastest film to gross \$300 million, making it to that mark in 28 days compared to *Titanic's* 44.

Just to put these numbers, which seem more immense than the Death Star, into some kind of perspective, take a look at how, in just three weeks, Episode I's box office pace stacked up

against other recent blockbuster successes. For instance, the top grossing movie of 1998 was *Saving Private Ryan*, but *The Phantom Menace* surpassed *Ryan's* total year-long gross of \$216.1 million in just 15 days.

In addition, many industry pundits scoffed when Episode I's three-day opening weekend did not top that of *The Lost World*, which debuted on the four-day Memorial Day holiday weekend in 1997. But the cynics were silent when Episode I sailed past *The Lost World's* total take of \$229.1 million in a Millennium Falcon-fast 17 days.

All of this, of course, is just the beginning. When the *Insider* went to press, *The Phantom Menace* had only just begun its North American box-office run, and still had yet to open in the rest of the world. At presstime, Episode I had just topped the box office in Singapore and Malaysia, opened in Columbia, and opened to record-setting results in the U.S. territory of Puerto Rico and Australia, where its \$5.9 million opening weekend made it *Down Under's* biggest opening ever.

But despite the unprecedented commercial success, Lucasfilm president Gordon Radley told *The Hollywood Reporter* that Lucasfilm did not "set out to break records," explaining, "We just wanted to have the best *Star Wars* movie ever, one that everyone could enjoy. *Star Wars* is about having a great time at the movies with your friends and family. We're thrilled and overwhelmed that so many people went to see Episode I." ☺

STAR*WARS*FLU*STRIKES

» THOUSANDS PHONE IN SICK ON EPISODE I OPENING DAY

by Kevin Fitzpatrick

"**STAR WARS FLU,**" — "WOOKIEE HOOKY" — **CALL IT WHAT YOU WILL**, there was only way to explain the overwhelming number of people taking off of work on May 19: they wanted to see *Star Wars: Episode I The Phantom Menace* on opening day. As a prominent employment consultant told the *Insider*, "This has the potential of being the largest day of work absenteeism in the history of the United States."

The opening of Episode I, it seemed, was turning into a national holiday. The Associated Press reported that 2.2 million American workers would call in sick on May 19. According to analysts at Challenger, Gray & Christmas in Chicago, the loss in productivity could cost American companies more than \$293 million.

"A lot of companies might as well close the doors that day because they're not going to have enough work force to operate up to normal," consultant John Challenger predicted. "Everybody will be calling in sick to see this movie."

But Utah-based cosmetics company NuSkin Enterprises headed off such a scenario by buying each of its 1,600 employees two tickets to see the film. Virginia-based Decipher, clearly no unbiased observer, took off en masse, and waggishly dubbed the holiday "St. Lucas Day."

In Oceanside, California, the owner of Callaway Golf bought 350 tickets at a local theater for employees and their family members as an Opening Day treat. In New York, a Web design firm, The Chopping Block, used its small staff to work the phones in advance of May 19, so the whole staff could see the new *Star Wars* on opening day. When the lights went up, they all trooped back to work—to discuss the movie.

And even in traffic-snarled Los Angeles, motorists found a happy surprise on the freeways: the usually gridlocked routes were absolutely clear, even during rush hour. *The Los Angeles Times* described area traffic on May 19 as "unusually light," attributing the phenomenon to *Phantom*. Where was everyone? In bed with the *Star Wars* Flu, of course!

MAY*THE*SCHWARZ *BE*WITH*YOU

» JAKE LLOYD OPENS STAR WARS SHOP AT FAO SCHWARZ

MORE THAN 100 LUCKY KIDS got to meet Jake Lloyd, Anakin Skywalker himself, when the young actor opened the *Star Wars*



Headquarters at the landmark New York City toy store FAO Schwarz. The party was held the evening of May 18, just hours before Episode I

opened. A full-size Podracer hung from the ceiling, and Lucas Licensing unveiled the most comprehensive *Star Wars* retail display in the country. Joked Jake, "I think a lot of people should go see the film—if it wasn't such a good film, they wouldn't have so much merchandise, right?"

—Kevin Fitzpatrick

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EMPIRE STRIKES by Scott Chernoff EMPIRE STATE

» THE STARS OF EPISODE I GATHER IN NEW YORK TO UNVEIL THE PHANTOM MENACE.

LIAM NEESON, NATALIE PORTMAN, SAMUEL L. JACKSON, PERNILLA AUGUST, Ahmed Best, and Jake Lloyd, along with George Lucas and Rick McCallum, invaded New York City the first weekend in May for *Star Wars: Episode I The Phantom Menace's* official press junket at Central Park's Hyatt Regency Hotel, answering questions from the press following screenings at the United Artists Union Square Theater on Broadway.

With the film completed barely two weeks before, the weekend served as not only a reunion for the actors but also their first opportunity to see the movie they'd shot nearly two years before—and the stars responded as jubilantly as fans. Declared Sam Jackson, "The whole thing worked—can I see it again?"

Observed Liam Neeson, "It's like being very hungry for a very long time, and somebody brings out a tray of all your favorite foods—but you have time to just grab the french fries before it's all taken away! I need to see it a few more times."

Pernilla August also required a repeat viewing. "For me, it was so overwhelming," she said. "It's so much to take in. I think I've got to see it one more time."

Natalie Portman agreed. "It's awesome," she said. "I had to take it all in again, because the first time I saw it, there were whole scenes that didn't even enter my mind—I was so amazed by all the scenery that I got distracted."

Ahmed Best had good reason to be distracted. "The first time I saw it, I was sitting next to Harrison Ford," he exclaimed. "That flipped me out. It was crazy, because I was looking at him and then looking at the movie, and then him and seeing his reaction—he was on the edge of his seat. And I was just thinking, 'I'm watching *Star Wars: Episode I*, and Han Solo is right there!'"

Neeson, meanwhile, wanted to stamp out a rumor that had started that week, when word spread that he was retiring from movies to concentrate on live theater. In truth, he said, he was only kidding when he told a magazine reporter he was quitting film, and was surprised to see it make the news. "That was said in jest, and somebody ran with it like an American with a football," Neeson insisted. "It's a long, boring story, but it's not true. I do want to go back and do more stage, though."

Asked if he would return for another *Star Wars* movie as a Jedi spirit, Neeson shrugged

sheepishly and grinned, as if to ask, "Have you heard anything?"

When it came to not knowing the story, no actor came into the weekend less informed than Jackson, who only knew the scenes he shot. Jackson finally learned the story of Episode I, he said, "last night—I really haven't had time to go on the Internet and read the script, so I had no idea."

A fan since opening day of the first *Star Wars* movie in 1977, Jackson said he was just as blown away the fourth time around. "The characters are as interesting as the characters we've seen previously," he raved, "and those new worlds are really great. There's some great stuff happening there, and it's really cool because you have to stop and think to yourself, 'Wow, those battle droids break really easily—oh, that's right, this is before they have stormtroopers with the armor, and they had more stuff on them so they could better take a hit. Ships can't be as ragged as they were in the others, because this is prior.' So it takes a fertile mind to remember and look at it all."

Portman said the first thing that struck her about the finished film was the difference

» CONTINUED ON PAGE 21

**WHERE IN
THE GALAXY
CAN YOU GET
YOUR HANDS
ON THE NEW
STAR WARS:
EPISODE I
ORNAMENTS?**



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LUCAS TAKES MANHATTAN

THE MORNING AFTER UNVEILING THE PHANTOM MENACE for the media in New York City, director George Lucas sat down for a press conference at Hyatt's Regency Hotel. Of course, the Insider was there, afforded the rare opportunity to pose a question to Lucas almost immediately after seeing his new film—which was a good thing, since we couldn't help but wonder something about the ending of *The Phantom Menace*...

George, at the end of Episode I, why doesn't Qui-Gon Jinn disappear the way Obi-Wan does in *A New Hope* and Yoda does in *Return of the Jedi*?

The Qui-Gon Jinn thing you will discover, as time goes on. There is a whole issue around that and the ability to disappear. The key line which you will use to understand this is when Ben Kenobi tells Darth Vader, "Strike me down and I'll become more, more..." (Stops to recall the line.)

"...More powerful than you could possibly imagine."

(Laughs.) Hey, he's the fan magazine — what do I know about these things? (Laughs.) But that's a key line, and it will be explained as we go along.

You've mentioned that after Episode III, you want to make other films. How specific are your ideas? Do you just want to, in general, make other films—or do you have specific projects in your head you're ready to make?

Yes, I have very specific projects. I have TV shows, I have movies, I have a whole line of them and it's really a matter of which I'm going to do first. I don't know which one I'm going to start with when I finish these, because five years from now, I don't know where my head will be. I know I've got a lot of them sitting on the shelf, and some I'm very anxious to get working on, but we'll see when I get there. I have many more films in me that I would like to do than I think I have time to do them.

Did you get the film you set out to make this time?

Yes. This is the one time I was able let my imagination run wild and not be hampered by, "Oh, I can't do this, I can't do that, I can't go to Coruscant, I'll never be able to do the buildings, I can't do a Podrace because that's impossible." I could dream up whatever I wanted, and for

the most part I was able to pull it all off.

What works best for you? What are you most pleased with?

I like the whole movie. I've taken some chances in storytelling and the way I've put it together, and I think by and large I've been successful. It's always a little nerve-racking when you're taking some risks and nobody's seen the film, you don't quite know whether it's going to work or not.



George Lucas at Leavesden Studios in London.

What is Shmi saying when she says, "There was no father." Is Anakin Skywalker like an intergalactic Jesus?

I've been very conscious about not making *Star Wars* religion-specific. The issue of immaculate conception is a motif that goes through all religions, through all stories about the local deity or the local hero. It's the same thing with Hercules. Most heroes are conceived in an unusual way. And this particular piece is actually not immaculate conception—it's conception by metaphor, I would say. I'm taking the idea of symbiotic relationships and trying to demonstrate it in a more concrete way.

Midichlorians are a loose depiction of mitochondria, which are really necessary in

order for cells to divide and probably had something to do with the beginnings of life, and how one cell decided to become two cells with a little help from this other little creature. Life could not exist without it, and it's really a way of saying that we have hundreds of little creatures that live with us and without them, we'd all die. There wouldn't be any life. They are necessary for us, and we are necessary for them. And I'm using them in the metaphor to say that society is the same way: we must all get along with each other. And the planet is the same way: we must treat the other creatures on this planet with respect; otherwise, the planet will die.

Some seem to want to turn *Star Wars* into a religion. What is your reaction to that?

It is only a movie. I think people should have a well-rounded life, and I'm happy that *Star Wars* stimulates young peoples' imagination. It's designed to make people think about the larger entities, and the mysteries of life, and hopefully they will question them. There definitely aren't enough answers in *Star Wars* to constitute a religion, and I think that the point is for them to go and look through the religions, and find something that has some answers for them.

Is there a danger in mixing spiritual messages about the Force with all of the materialistic merchandising of the movie?

The movie and the merchandising are two different things. They're not connected. I'm an independent filmmaker from San Francisco, and I have to make sure that I have exploited everything I possibly can in a movie. The licensing thing is something that just sort of grew spontaneously. It certainly wasn't something anybody predicted, especially us. The first toys didn't even come out until a year after the first film came out, and it's grown into this big opportunity which has helped finance the movies for me. I enjoy toys, and I make the films to stimulate the imaginations of the audience, and especially the young people who see the film. I think play is a good thing, a healthy thing, and I think letting kids play with toys and use their imaginations is not an evil thing.

You've said Luke Skywalker was your favorite character in the first Star Wars trilogy. Who's your favorite character in *The Phantom Menace*?

It's hard to say. Actually, I think my favorite characters are the pit droids, but they are very low on the totem pole. I like all the characters. The problem with creating characters is that they're like your children—you love them all.

The romance between Princess Leia and Han Solo was a big part of the first trilogy. Why was there no romance in *The Phantom Menace*?

The romance comes in the next film. The problem with this film is the two romantic characters are a little too young for romance. It's more about parental love than it is about a normal romance.

You've hinted you might not relinquish the directing reins for Episodes II and III as you did for Y and VI. What's your plan?

I'm back as a director now, and I will be directing II and III. I found going back to directing just like I hadn't stopped. And in some ways I hadn't stopped, because I had been directing second unit, and I've been very involved in the creative process in everything I've done since I stopped directing.

It seems like much of the media spent months building up Episode I only to revel in tearing it down as soon as it debuted. What do you make of the media backlash?

Most of the *Star Wars* movies have gotten, generally, bad reviews. They have mostly been trashed one way or another, especially in the major media, so I certainly expect not to do well critically. I never have. When you get in a situation like this, where there is so much high expectation, you can't possibly live up to that. I am fully aware of the fact that some of the fans have unfortunately gotten themselves into that situation, both in the fact that they've gotten much older and the film is really for young people, and the fact that they have these amazing expectations about the film which the film can't possibly meet. So I've never really considered that part of it. I was just making another movie and trying to finish the series.

What do you think of the idea that Episode I must "beat" *Titanic* to be successful?

I don't know where that came from, because anybody who knows the film business knows that the chances of a sequel beating the origi-

"ACTUALLY, I THINK MY FAVORITE CHARACTERS ARE THE PIT DROIDS, BUT THEY ARE VERY LOW ON THE TOTEM POLE. I LIKE ALL THE CHARACTERS. THE PROBLEM WITH CREATING CHARACTERS IS THAT THEY'RE LIKE YOUR CHILDREN—YOU LOVE THEM ALL."

nal are slim to none. And I don't even think this will really beat *E.T.* I think the film would make its money back even if it wasn't one of the top ten grossers. This is not a contest. It's this adversarial society we live in, where somebody has to be a winner and everybody else has to be a loser. It's a movie, I made it because I enjoyed making the movies, and I hope it does well. I really don't have any interest or desire to be #1, or win an Academy Award, or count how many good reviews I get as opposed to how many bad reviews I get. That's not what it's really about. It's about the process of making the movie.

Are you surprised at the number of people planning on missing work to go see *The Phantom Menace* on opening day?

I think it has more to do with people not wanting to go to work than going to the movies! I'm a little surprised at the amount of attention the film has gotten. We have actually tried very hard not to let the film be over-hyped, but it sort of got out of control and got over-hyped anyway, so there's not much you can do about these things. I think the enthusiasm and people waiting in lines and all that is just spontaneous on the part of the people who have enjoyed the movies, enjoyed the experience, and want to repeat that enjoyment. It's very clear, at least to me, that most of the kids who are waiting on line and having a good time are doing it because they enjoy waiting in line and having a good time and seeing friends and talking and everything, and the movie is basically the excuse to do that.

You said Episode I is meant for children. Is that why you introduce Anakin when he is so young?

Well, that's really where the story starts. This story was written 20 years ago when I wrote a backstory, and it started when he was young and the issues of where he came from, the fact that he was a slave, the fact that he was separated from his mother. These kinds of things are important story points, so I had to start at a young age.

Originally, I had him about 12 years old, but then when I started writing the screenplay, I realized that the issues of leaving his mother and these things weren't quite as dramatic as they needed to be, and I moved him down to 10 years old because I felt it worked better.

Did you set out purposely to make Episode I more kid-friendly?

Not really. I don't think it's any more kid-friendly than the other films. I think that's one of the reasons [the classic trilogy] got a lot of bad reviews—they said, "This is just a Disney movie." But somehow over the years, people have sort of drifted away from that and tried to make it into something other than what it actually is.

When did you first find out that Ewan McGregor is Denis Lawson's nephew?

Well, that was the first thing he said when he came in for his audition—"You've got to give me this part because my uncle was Wedge." I said, "OK, that's a good enough reason."

What is happening with the development of the digital camera for Episode II, and can you tell us anything about what that innovation will mean to the look and feel of the film?

Panavision is developing the lenses, and Sony is developing the cameras. I've used some prototypes on this film. The film ultimately was all digital—it was all put into a computer, manipulated, and then taken out again. Shooting it digitally makes it easier to put it into the computer. Translating from film to a completely digital medium is a very difficult thing to do—it's expensive and takes a lot of time. By shooting digitally, it speeds the process and makes it much easier. A portion of Episode I was done that way, and I don't think anybody can tell what part of the film was shot digitally and what part of the film was shot on film.

What part of the film was shot digitally?

I'm not going to tell you, but there are a number of shots in there that are digital.

HE'D LIKE TO HAVE A FEW WORDS WITH YOU.



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What do you think of *Star Wars* fans on the Internet?

I like the fans. They've always been central, and now that they're connected by the Internet, I think that says more about the nature of the Internet, and the fact that like-minded people can join together despite geographic boundaries and have a community.

Do you have a map of the *Star Wars* universe in your head—where every creature comes from, what they eat, their society back home?

I think somewhere in the dark recesses of my company there is something like that, but I've never seen it. I don't really know. Even though I live this and I know the worlds very well, and I know what everything is, half the time I'm in the fortunate position of being able to just make it up. So if somebody asks me a question, I know what the consistencies are, I know what's consistent with a particular environment and what isn't. Part of the job of the director is to sort of keep everything in line, and I can do that in the movies—but I can't do it on the whole *Star Wars* universe.

You seem to have done more interviews in the last six months than you have in the last 10 years. Do you feel more comfortable these days doing publicity?

I'm glad you asked that, because you're referring basically to what I would describe as a media myth. I normally do, in years when I don't release a movie, about 15 or 20 interviews, and when I do a movie, I normally do about 40. For my last picture, *Radioland Murders*, and the TV series (*Young Indiana Jones Chronicles*), I did over 100 interviews. On this one, I've cut it down. I've always been very out there—it's just that in past years nobody's ever paid any attention. And I live in San Francisco, which most of the media seem to think is the end of the earth, so they think of me as this kind of reclusive Howard Hughes type that doesn't do interviews, but I actually do quite a bit of press.

Do you recall your immediate reaction the first time you heard Bill Murray sing the *Star Wars* theme on *Saturday Night Live*?

I loved it. I laughed a lot. It's one of my favorite tunes. ☺

—Reporting by Scott Chernoff and Kevin Fitzpatrick

» STAR WARS STARS IN NEW YORK FROM PAGE 14

between the physical sets and the final versions. "It's so weird, because I was expecting to see Caserta Palace," she said, "and what they put around it is amazing. They really made something pretty much from scratch—I didn't recognize 99 percent of the settings. It's weird to watch yourself walking around a place you've never been to!"

Said Ahmed Best, "It was everything *Star Wars* is supposed to be—great action, great story, great effects. It just sucks you in and gets going so fast. As soon as you sit down—take this!"

Added Jackson, "It's a fascinating world. George has allowed us to go to a place that's kind of like we always talk about what we want our world to be, where you look around and see, like, green people, blue people, hairy people, bald people, short people, tall people, skinny people, winged people—all kinds of things, and nobody ever talks about what people look like. Everybody's just dealing with each other like there are no differences."

As the actors reflected on Episode I, their thoughts naturally turned toward the next installments in the *Star Wars* saga. "I'm really looking forward to the next two," Portman said. With the role of the older Anakin not yet cast, Portman was asked if she minds not knowing who her romantic co-star would be.

"I don't mind at all that I don't know," she said, "because [casting director] Robin Gurland is so wonderful. I think she cast this film so well—all the actors, I thought, were wonderful in this movie. People keep asking me, 'Who would you cast,' and I really don't have any preferences." The actress added, "I haven't heard any names mentioned at all—I don't think she's even started her search yet."

But while Jake Lloyd would be too young to reprise his role as Anakin in Episode II, the star did suggest a character he could play in the movie: "Jar Jar's son!" ☺

—Additional Reporting by Kevin Fitzpatrick

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In his first exclusive *Insider* interview, Ahmed Best—the man behind Jar Jar—bares all about being Binks.

best

JAR JAR BINKS IS REAL. Oh, sure, we've seen the movie—we know he's "computer-generated." But if that's true, then tell me how a bunch of digitized ones and zeroes can combine to become one of the funniest, most original, and touchingly human characters in the first episode of the *Star Wars* saga.

The answer is as simple as the technology involved is complex: beyond all the eye-popping breakthroughs in digital character animation achieved by ILM is the performance of a funny, original and almost super-humanly talented man named Ahmed Best. The performer, 25, is far more than just the voice and on-set stand-in for Jar Jar—he is the character's heart and soul.

But Best might never have gotten the part had Episode I casting director Robin Gurland not seen him on stage in the hit show *Stomp*, a unique physical theater piece that features performers using their bodies and everyday objects such as brooms and trash cans to create one-of-a-kind song-and-dance numbers. Best, who grew up on martial arts and physical comedy, turned out to be the best choice for the challenge of creating a comedic character through body language and digital animation (see "Jar Jar Genesis," page 28, for more on the ILM side of the equation).

The insider caught up with the busy actor/musician (he's released three albums with the funk/hip-hop band the Jazzhole and has a solo project in the works—see "Ahmed Best Lands the Mothership," page 69) just before *The Phantom Menace* was finished. Although he still lives in a small apartment in his beloved Brooklyn (he was born in Manhattan but grew up with a fraternal twin brother and older sister in the South Bronx and later Maplewood, New Jersey), Best was staying at what had almost become his home away from home—Skywalker Ranch, where he was helping ILM put the final touches on what he calls their "50-50 collaboration" on the character of Jar Jar Binks.

YOU STARTED OUT AS A MUSICIAN, RIGHT?

I still play music. I'm primarily a musician. I've always done both music and acting at the same time, though. I never said, "I have to choose one or the other." I grew up around that environment. Since my mother was a stay-at-home mom, she was always searching for things to interest her. I remember being young and seeing my mother painting in the kitchen while we were playing in the living room. There was a lot of art in my house as a kid.

Plus, growing up in the south Bronx, you're trying to escape the street, so to speak, in so many different ways, and escape the environment, because the environment is not conducive to an artistic mind. Well, what's good is there are so many different cultures and influences all coming together in a melting pot area, so you get bombarded by it—it's like sensory overload. But being a musician, or being an actor, is not one of those things they encourage in the inner cities. There's a big education problem in the inner cities.

YET YOU WERE ABLE TO STAY FOCUSED ON THE ARTS.

Yeah, I've always done school plays, and in about '84, I had a breakdance troupe. I was in the fifth grade, and we used to put on shows for all the kids in the younger grades. We were called the Atomic Boogie Breakers. A lot of my movement for Jar Jar came from breakdancing.

WOW—WHAT JAR JAR MOVES EVOLVED FROM BREAKDANCING?

The walk, mostly, is what got inspired by breakdancing. When I first auditioned for George, which was really weird, because—well, my first audition for George was a motion capture session. I had no idea what motion capture was, I had no idea what I was going to do. Robin Gurland, the casting director, brought me in this room with all these infrared cameras and all of these people sitting behind computers. I didn't know anybody, I didn't know what was going on or what was happening. It was kind of intimidating. They gave me this suit to put on, right? And it was, I'm talking a body-glove, skin-tight suit. Plus, these six inch wooden platform sneakers, because the character is taller than I am—they built these sneakers that had wooden soles.

I put these sneakers on, and I put this headband on, and I looked like, you know, an aerobics instructor from hell. It was definitely the '80s—I looked like, "Let's get physical." And

friend

by Scott Chernoff

WHAT ARE YOU DOING AT THE RANCH RIGHT NOW?

I just finished doing some motion capture for Rob Coleman and those animation guys, and then I did a couple of voice-overs for a CD-ROM game yesterday.

IS IT FUN DOING THE MOTION CAPTURE STUFF?

Yeah, it's great. I'm a little sore, though—I was doing a lot of acrobatics.

HOW DOES THAT WORK? DO THEY HAVE SENSORS ATTACHED TO YOU?

Yeah, I wear this—it kind of looks like a scuba suit, and attached to the scuba suit are all these little light sensors, kind of like ping pong balls. So we have about a dozen infrared cameras around the room and whenever I move, all the infrared cameras pick up the little light sensors that are attached onto the suit. That immediately gets transferred into data that the computer picks up.

DOES WEARING THE SENSORS MAKE IT ANY HARDER TO DO THOSE AEROBATICS?

Yeah, it makes it a lot harder—because if you land on one of them, it hurts! It doesn't inhibit my movement at all, but it is a little uncomfortable when you fall on your face.

EPISODE I IS YOUR FIRST MAJOR MOTION PICTURE. HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN PERFORMING?

All my life. I was always a show-off as a kid. My mother was in college at the Fashion Institute of Technology in Manhattan, and there was a little fashion show that all the kids were doing—my brother and sister and I were in this fashion show, and I think that's when the bug started. I was about 3 years old.

I was in this skin-tight, really embarrassing suit, with all these people that I've never seen before looking at me, and I'm thinking, "I don't know what I'm doing here."

Before George walked in, they said, "Let me see you walk." I had developed this walk that was kind of in-between a cool bop from the 50's and a glide, which is a breakdance move where it looks like you're gliding across the floor—like a moonwalk going forward. So I'm doing this walk—which is really hard to do in these platform shoes—in the skin-tight suit and I've got all these ping pong ball light sensors and things all over me, and then George walks in.

I'm just like, "This is really embarrassing. George Lucas is walking in, looking at me and probably thinking, 'This dude is crazy.'" So he walks in, and I'm just like, "How ya doin'?" I'm Olivia Newton-John." But George was really cool about it. I mean, I'm sure he's seen a lot weirder things in his time.

RIGHT. DID YOU ALWAYS HAVE TO WEAR THOSE WOODEN SHOES WHEN YOU DID THE MOTION CAPTURE WORK?

No, only for that one session—they decided not to go with the shoes after that. The hardest thing to do on those things was make flips and stuff. Those shoes were just inhibiting. I couldn't have walked in the desert with those shoes on. I had some lifts in the Jar Jar costume, but they were only about three inches and they weren't wooden. They were a hard foam, and they were more comfortable.

WAS BREAKDANCING WHAT STARTED YOU DEVELOPING THE KIND OF PHYSICAL PERFORMANCE YOU USED IN STOMP AND AS JAR JAR?

It mostly came from breakdancing. But simultaneously, while I was growing up as a breakdancer and a musician, I was a martial artist. My father was a sensei at this school in Brooklyn, and he taught us Japanese Go Ju Ru, karate. Also, I eventually started taking martial arts that Bruce Lee invented called Je Kun Do, and I started taking Kapa We Da, which is a Brazilian martial art.

I grew up around martial arts. I'm a huge Jackie Chan fan, and a huge Bruce Lee fan. I used to copy Bruce Lee and Jackie Chan moves, and make up little fight choreography by myself. What I admired most about Jackie Chan was the physical comedy he did while he was doing Kung Fu. Then when I was about 14, I saw a Buster Keaton movie, and I saw the relationship between Jackie Chan and Buster Keaton—how they could make how they moved funny. I used to watch those movies all the time, and every chance I got, like in a school play, I would try to put a little Jackie Chan or Buster Keaton move into what I was doing. I also got into Charlie Chaplin.

[Jar Jar is] not afraid to be who he is. He doesn't worry about what he looks like, what he says, what he acts like, what he does. He just goes for it, does it. No inhibitions.

The cool thing about those movies, which helped me a lot later in my life, was the fact that you couldn't hear them speak, but their conversation came across in their body language. I really dug that.

I was always singing and drumming and acting, and then when I was about 20, I auditioned for Stomp. I was broke and I was living in a really small apartment in Brooklyn—I still am living in a really small apartment in Brooklyn, but it was smaller—and I was playing in a band, my first band, but we were only making 20 bucks a week. It was a funk-rock band called Cosmic Ghetto. The band was fantastic, but it wasn't lucrative at all, so I said, "I have to start auditioning for stuff." The first thing I auditioned for was Stomp, and I got the job, so that was cool. I didn't have to audition for anything anymore.

FOR PEOPLE WHO HAVE NEVER SEEN IT, HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE STOMP?

Stomp is musical theater, but it goes a little further. It's not musical theater in the sense of *The Sound of Music* or *Phantom of the Opera*—it's a performance art/musical theater. It's percussion on everyday, household items, and movement. And it takes you on a journey through sound. It takes you on a journey through discovery and—it's hard to describe Stomp. It's a heavily sensory kind of theater. I call it extreme theater. There are all of these extreme sports going on, and Stomp is really extreme physically, because we're running and jumping and sweeping and kicking and swinging from the ceiling. So it's a bit of extreme theater.

DID YOU KNOW THAT ROBIN GURLAND WAS IN THE AUDIENCE OF STOMP THAT FIRST NIGHT SHE SAW YOU IN SAN FRANCISCO?

I didn't know that Robin was in the house. I had no idea—I was just doing my job. The funny thing about that night is I wasn't doing the role that I usually do, because one of our performers got violently ill. And I usually lead off the show. So I had to do another role, a role called Potato Head, which is primarily a drumming role. It's not really a funny role—I was basically holding down the rhythm. But I got a couple of cool flourish moments, a broom solo, so I got some time to show off. And I guess that was enough to get Robin's attention.

I came up to the Ranch the next day, and I met Robin and she got out a little video camera and asked me to do some impromptu Jar Jar stuff. I still want to see the video for that, because I was doing some ridiculous stuff, stuff that never even turned out to be about Jar Jar—except for maybe the facial expressions and stuff like that. After that initial one, then I did the embarrassing motion capture one. And then I got the call. I was still on the road with Stomp and I got a call in Philly—Robin said that they wanted to offer me the part.

HOW DID YOU FEEL WHEN YOU HEARD THAT?

I was shocked. I was like, "What? Are you serious? You guys can't be serious about this." But it was serious. It was crazy. I couldn't believe it. I was bouncing off the walls. Not everybody was as excited as I was. People were like, "Wow, that's cool. That's great that you'll be in it." And I was like, "Did you hear me? I said Star Wars. *STAR WARS*, you know? [Sings to the tune of the saga's Main Title:] Da-da-da-da-da-da, and the lightsabers, and Darth Vader—[stops singing] you know, Star Wars!"

SO YOU WERE A STAR WARS FAN GROWING UP?

Huge—and I never stopped being a Star Wars fan. Star Wars was the first movie I ever saw. Ever. I was three years old, and I remember walking into a packed theater, my father putting me up on the chair. We came into the theater late, and the first scene that I remember seeing was the Mos Eisley scene where Ben Kenobi, Luke, C-3PO, and R2-D2 are in the landspeeder, and Ben Kenobi does the Jedi mind trick to the stormtroopers—"You don't need to see his identification."

I remember this as a vivid memory—watching the whole movie is a vivid memory. Ever since that day, I was a huge Star Wars fan. I had the sheets, the pillowcases, the curtains—everything that said Star Wars on it.

WHAT WAS IT ABOUT STAR WARS THAT SO ENTRANCED YOU?

Mostly the Jedi stuff. When I was a kid, being into the martial arts, I was really into the lightsaber fighting and the Jedi mind trick, all the superhero kind of stuff that the Jedi could do. But as I got older, I got into Han Solo. Because Han Solo was just the coolest cat in the galaxy, you know?



» ABOVE: Jar Jar [Ahmed Best] grabs a quick snack on the streets of Mos Espa on Tatooine in *Star Wars: Episode I The Phantom Menace*. INSET: Ahmed Best in the Jar Jar stand-in suit, on set.

Even though the hero was Luke Skywalker, Han Solo was that renegade who doesn't follow any rules. The guy who gets all the cool girls and drives the coolest car and lives dangerously and has a big carpet as his sidekick. He was just the coolest guy. I mean, how many dudes could speak Wookiee?

I always kid around with George and say, "If I'm in the next movie, you've got to make me Han Solo's daddy. I wanna be Han Solo's pop."

WAS THERE A SEMINAL STAR WARS MOMENT WHEN IT ALL SANK IN THAT YOU ARE NOW A PART OF THE SAGA?

Yeah, R2-D2 was actually the real. That was the part where I said, "This is real." It was three days into shooting, and I was on the set with Ewan, Natalie, Jake, Ian McDiarmid, Terence Stamp, and all the women who played the handmaidens. The robotics guys wheeled in R2-D2, and everybody got really excited like, "This is it! This is *Star Wars*! This is R2-D2!" It was amazing, because, you know, when you're a kid, you're just like, "Man, it would be great if I had a droid right about now to just finish all the rest of these chores—I sure wish R2-D2 was around," you know what I'm saying? And then R2-D2 comes rolling in!

WAS IT CHALLENGING TRYING TO CONVEY A CHARACTER TO BREAK THROUGH THE COMPUTER GENERATED SURFACE?

I pretty much had to imagine I was this amphibian creature. Nobody knows what this amphibian creature is going to be—what he's going to move like or sound like, what's going to make him excited, or sad. Nobody knows his emotions, mood swings, anything like that—it's not human. So I came from that whole left field perspective: I'm not playing a human being. I can't walk, talk, move, react like a human being. So it was a great experience for me in that respect.

It's hard because a lot of people don't realize that mostly everything about this character other than the way he looks was developed by me, with the direction of George on the set, and that they digitally animate pretty much everything that I do. There's a lot of stuff the animators put in, but a lot of people get the misconception that digital animation is how this character came to life. That's not completely true. It was a completely 50-50 operation. Completely 50-50.

WHAT WAS IT LIKE WEARING THAT BIG JAR JAR SUIT ON THE SET?

That was crazy. I would be in a scene, and then they they'd shoot the

scene without me so the animators could track my movements from the other take, or from the motion capture. What you see Jar Jar in, is what I was wearing. I didn't have any makeup over my face, but I had Jar Jar's head on top of my head and then a hat kind of thing. I was wearing everything—the arms, the feet, the little waistcoat—I was in all that. And it was hot—crazy hot in the desert, and I didn't have a double, so I had to stay out there all day. Everybody else had doubles.

WHY DID YOU NOT HAVE A DOUBLE?

Nobody else could fit in the suit! They made the suit especially for my body—they casted my body in plaster. It was my first day at Leavesden, and I walk into creature effects, and they tell me, "We're going to body cast you for the Jar Jar suit." And I said, "OK, what do I have to do?" They show me to a dressing room and they go, "Put on this skin-tight lycra suit." And I was like, "Oh no, not again!"

They have a solution mixed with baby oil and water, and they paint the solution over the suit. And I had to stand in this one spot, with my arms stretched out, holding these two pieces of wood so they can get every inch—under the arms, around the wrists, everything. Then they put these gauze strips dipped in plaster all over my body, from the top of my head, all the way down to the tips of my toes. It's like when those dudes break every bone in their body in a ski accident, so it goes from really cold to really hot in a matter of minutes. I'm standing there, just thinking, "Oh man, if I wasn't a *Star Wars* fan..."

WAS THE IDEA OF YOU WEARING THE SUIT MORE TO HELP THE OTHER ACTORS VISUALIZE THE CHARACTER?

In the beginning, that's what it was, until they realized that, wait a minute, there's a character underneath all of this stuff. Then eventually, I just had to be there, because I was the character. But yes, everybody got used to it. It makes the acting a little easier when you see this creature that you can relate to, that already has a voice, an attitude, a mind of its own, and moves.

WAS IT MORE DIFFICULT TO DO YOUR MOVES BECAUSE OF THE SUIT? BUSTER KEATON AND JACKIE CHAN NEVER HAD TO DEAL WITH ANYTHING LIKE THAT.

Yeah, it was hard. But you know, the suit had a lot of give to it, so I'd break it in for a while and work the suit until it worked. It worked out all right. It was difficult, but it came across.



WE'VE TALKED A LOT ABOUT THE TECHNOLOGY OF JAR JAR, BUT WHAT ABOUT JAR JAR AS A CHARACTER—HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE HIM?

Jar Jar is a loyal, honest, innocent character who really means well. Jar Jar tries to do everything—he tries to help out. He's constantly trying to do right and gain approval. But Jar Jar is also very much a no-nonsense character, because there are a bunch of lines in the film where Jar Jar kind of takes the piss out of the Jedi. He doesn't fall for that whole big Jedi mind trick superiority kind of thing. Because Jar Jar knows what he knows, and if he hasn't seen it, then he doesn't believe it.

I think the best word to describe Jar Jar is honest. He's 100 percent honesty. If he doesn't like something, he'll say he doesn't like it—no matter who he's talking to. If he can't do it, he'll be just like, "Well, I can't do it." He's just a completely honest creature.

He's great fun, because there's a lot of room to be Jar Jar. There were a lot of times on the set where I was asking George, "Is this a bit over the top, do you think? Is it too much?" And George was like, "No, it's fine." For instance, a couple of scenes where I'm throwing up my hands and cheering, just out of blind excitement—as me, I wouldn't do it, because it's embarrassing. But as Jar Jar, that's who he is, and he's not afraid to be who he is. That's the whole honesty behind Jar Jar. He's not afraid to be who he is. He doesn't worry about what he looks like, what he says, what he acts like, what he does. He just goes for it, does it. No inhibitions.

DID THE JAR JAR VOICE COME TO YOU NATURALLY? OR DID YOU TRY A FEW DIFFERENT ONES?

I looked at the face of the character and I just thought, "This is what the character should sound like." But at first, I wasn't going to do the voice. I asked Robin, the day that I got the body cast, "Do you have any idea who's going to do the voice?" She said "No, none whatsoever." And I said, "Well, I'll do it." I don't think she took me seriously at first. But the next day I called her up and said, "Can you fax me some lines?" She faxed me some lines and I did it over the phone, and she dug it. Then I did it for George, and he dug it, and they all just got used to it while we were on the set. I would do the lines on the set and everyone got so used to it that it was like, "Yeah, it'd be weird if Jar Jar didn't sound like this."

WAS IT WEIRD SPEAKING IN JAR JAR'S DISTINCT DIALECT?

Nah, it wasn't weird for me. I mean, try speaking Huttese—now that's weird. That's a weird language. But the Gungan language wasn't weird—it's kind of close to baby talk.

WHAT HAVE YOU BEEN DOING SINCE STAR WARS?

I did a couple more shows of *Stomp*, but other than that, I've been

working on my music, because that's primarily what I do. I've been writing and recording and producing, and hopefully I can get a record company to commit to me. It's a solo project under my name, a hip-hop/R&B project.

But you know, *Star Wars* has been going on for the whole two years. I've been going back and forth between England and Skywalker Ranch. It's been pretty consistent. They always figure out, "Ah man, we missed that," or, "We need Ahmed to come back to do that." I've done alarm clocks, I've done the dancing Jar Jar, I've done



» LEFT: An animated Jar Jar Binks [Ahmed Best] exclaims his disbelief while Obi-Wan Kenobi [Ewan McGregor] looks on in this scene from *Star Wars: Episode I—The Phantom Menace*. RIGHT: Jar Jar helps Jedi Knights Qui-Gon Jinn [Liam Neeson] and Obi-Wan Kenobi [Ewan McGregor] navigate through the planetary core in a Gungan bongo submarine.

two video games, and a pinball machine.

DID IT DAWN ON YOU AT SOME POINT THAT YOU MAY BE PLAYING THIS PART—BE IT IN MOVIES OR COMMERCIALS, OR ALARM CLOCKS OR VIDEO GAMES—FOR THE REST OF YOUR LIFE?

I hope so! But I want to do a bunch of things, especially in *Star Wars*, where I want to play a couple of different characters. I want to play Han Solo's daddy—I'm serious about that. It could happen—you know, it's the *Star Wars* world. It's all in George's mind. He could make that up. That's a character I would love to play. I could be, you know, Han Solo Sr.

WHAT DO YOU THINK HE WOULD BE LIKE?

Pretty much just like Han Solo, but I think he would probably be a bad father. Han Solo was so much of a renegade, he probably didn't have any positive role models—though he had probably encountered some cool people in his travels. But Han Solo would probably be the one to be the positive father, once he gets settled down with Leia.

SOUNDS LIKE YOU REALLY JUST WANT TO PLAY HAN SOLO.

I want to be Han Solo, man! Harrison Ford beat me to the punch. I wanna be Han Solo and Indiana Jones. I could be Indiana Washington!

I THINK WE'VE GOT A NEW FRANCHISE.

Exactly—Indiana Washington and the Ghetto of Doom. Something like that. But I love playing Jar Jar. I'll be getting all that stuff—the alarm clocks and action figures. They're sending it all to me. I'll be in my little one-bedroom apartment in Brooklyn, with every *Star Wars* toy. I'll die a broken old man in my one-bedroom apartment, saying, "I was in *Star Wars* and I was the cute Jar Jar! That was me!" ☺

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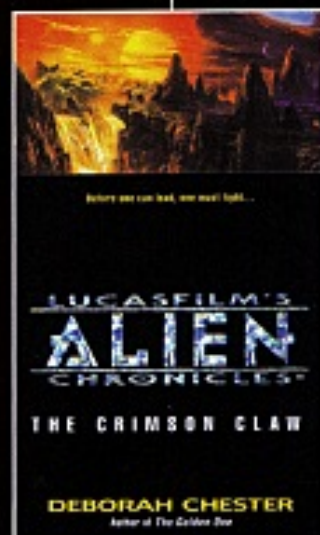
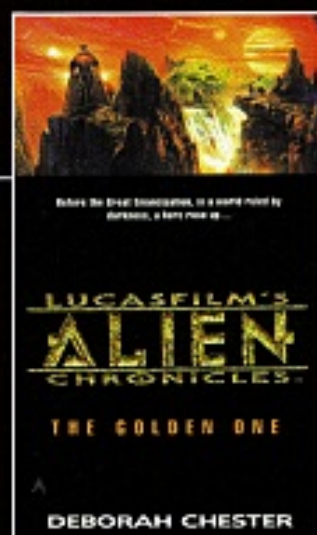
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JAR JAR GENESIS

» Your step-by-step, inside story of how the visual artists at ILM rose to their greatest challenge yet—the creation of computer generated hero Jar Jar Binks

by Mark Cotta Vax

THERE HAVE BEEN, OVER THE COURSE OF FILM HISTORY, a few seismic shifts—events and arrivals that changed the course of the medium, such as when silent reels gave way to the “Talkies” in the late 1920s. Yet despite all the advances, the movies have basically always been a medium of cameras and celluloid, chemical processing and light projection. Film.

But now, a new motion picture era is dawning, a time of breakthrough three-dimensional computer graphics (CG), and digital cameras, and data—the end of “film” itself. And like the fulfillment of a prophecy, the shape of things to come can be seen in every aspect of *Star Wars*: Episode I *The Phantom Menace*. From the model shop miniatures digitally fused with CG structures to create the vast alien cityscapes of Coruscant and Naboo, to the insertion of live, flesh-and-blood actors into synthetic, electronic environments, the long awaited “digital backlot” is here.

The face of the future is also embodied in the gangling, goggle-eyed Gungan Jar Jar Binks, the star performer of a new generation of digital actors. More than the animated characters of *Toy Story* (the first all-CG feature), this new wave of virtual creations must inhabit live-action worlds and perform alongside real, living performers.

The marriage of live actors with animation goes back to the 1920s and the hand-drawn *Out of the Inkwell* series produced by the fabled Fleischer Studios. The peak of that style of fusion of live action and traditional animation was Disney's *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* (1988), when actor Bob Hoskins got into the toon zone with a host of classic cartoon characters.

But it was the effects artists at Lucasfilm's Industrial Light & Magic who pioneered something new for feature films: the integration of photorealistic 3-D animation with live action. Way back in 1985, for *Young Sherlock Holmes*, ILM produced a computer generated knight who magically burst from a stained glass window. The next evolution took the amoeboid form of the watery pseudopod creature of *The Abyss* (1989) and the shape-changing, liquid-metal cyborg of *Terminator 2* (1991). The

breakthrough into the illusion of organic creatures came two years later with the digital dinosaurs of *Jurassic Park*.

One of those awestruck by the sights of a ruthless cyborg and a rampaging T-rex seemingly invading reality was Rob Coleman, a traditional cel animator and future Episode I animation director. “Seeing these creatures living in our real world, I just had to come to ILM,” smiled Coleman, whose pre-*Phantom* ILM work included supervising the menagerie of CG aliens on *Men in Black*.

“After I arrived,” he continued, “we started moving into thinking, acting characters. A lot of us came from traditional animation, so we were used to making line drawings move, breathing life into something that doesn't exist. The next step was to take that understanding and create a three-dimensional character which interacts with something every audience member understands—a real human being.”

That select company of ILM's “thinking, acting” CG characters includes the ghosts of *Casper* (1995) and the talking dragon Draco in *Dragonheart* (1996). But the digital actors of Episode I are a quantum leap on the evolutionary scale. The troupe of phenomenal *Phantom Menace* CG performers includes Watto, the cantankerous space junk dealer on Tatooine, and Sebulba, the ruthless Podrace pilot.

But Jar Jar Binks was a movie unto himself: almost 400 shots. Jar Jar would follow Jedi Knights Qui-Gon Jinn (Liam Neeson) and Obi-Wan Kenobi (Ewan McGregor) on a journey from the underwater city of Otoh Gunga to the exotic capital of Theed, from the desert wastes of Tatooine back to the battlefields of Naboo.

“Jar Jar is just as important to the plot as Qui-Gon, Obi-Wan, or the Queen,” noted computer graphics supervisor Doug Smythe. “He interacts with the live action characters—he's really on a par with them. After a while you forget he's a computer generated character!”

Added Kevin Martel, one of the lead Jar Jar animators, “I think this is the first time there's ever been a fully CG character who's just one of the guys.”

WHAT DOES A GUNGAN LOOK LIKE?



THE COMPLICATED CREATION OF JAR JAR (and all the CG characters) began with building a three-dimensional model form in the computer, and then animating it with believable performances. Next came the details: adding digital clothing; utilizing virtual lighting to integrate the character into his surrounding environment; completing the all-important “rendering” (the process of calculating the images of a CG character based on the model, animation, color and lighting) of the CG image; and, finally, compositing the character into the final scene.

But while Jar Jar's destiny was to be a breakthrough CG creation, the character's image was first developed with low-tech tools: pencil and marker on paper. Jar Jar started on the drawing boards, an idea that evolved out of Doug Chiang's concept design department, that creative font of the *Star Wars* universe located on the third floor of the Main House at Skywalker Ranch. Concept artist Terry Whitlatch, an expert in animal anatomy who handled the lion's share of creature designs, began working on the character in January, 1995.

In the concept phase, imagination rules. A proposed design can go through many iterations, but Jar Jar (who would also be the prototypal figure for the entire Gungan species), was one of the toughest *Phantom* characters to conjure. It would take a year and a half before Lucas approved a final design.

While Lucas described some characters to the smallest physical detail, Jar Jar began as an idea stripped to its basics: the male of the species, tall, amphibious, lead digital character. Fleshed out from the start was Lucas'

concept of Jar Jar's personality: earnest but bumbling, a social misfit, a character with the physical grace—and penchant for slapstick pratfalls—of Charlie Chaplin, Buster Keaton, and other classic comics of the cinema.

Whitlatch would later confess she sometimes despaired of ever coming up with a design Lucas would approve. The creative breakthrough came when the director saw an old doodle Whitlatch had

pinned to her bulletin board. She'd sketched out three views of a frog-like critter on its hind legs, eyes on stalks, a worried expression on its face. Lucas loved the look and from that image, which Whitlatch dubbed "proto-Jar Jar," a strange creature began to take form, a figure with the gait of a flightless emu; a muscular, swan-like neck; the head and duck-billed face of a Hadrosaur dinosaur; and long, fish-finned puppy dog ears.

HOW WOULD A GUNGAN MOVE?

BUT WHILE A CONCEPT HAD TAKEN FORM on paper, that wasn't the end of the design—in some ways it was the beginning. As CG modelers and others began to enter the picture, Lucas toyed with the possibilities of his emerging creation, from giving Jar Jar the power to physically expand and contract (discarded as making things too complex) to possibly realizing the character with a CG head composited onto the body of a live performer wearing a Jar Jar costume (with Lucas concluding the Gungan was best realized as a full CG figure).

The transition from two-dimensional drawings to a 3-D performer required the concept department to take Jar Jar line art, have it blown up to life-size, and then put it over a cardboard cut-out figure to begin appreciating the real scale of the eventual CG creation.

Another step was to sculpt and paint a detailed foot-tall physical reference model. Although such sculptures can then be scanned into a computer to form the basis for the CG figure, the Jar Jar animation model was built cold in the computer by model supervisor Geoff Campbell and his team. "For us the challenge and fun of Jar Jar was taking a drawing and translating that into a three-dimensional sculpture in the computer," Campbell said.

Lucas was eager to get going on the creation of his digital actor, so Campbell and modeler Stephen Aplin brought their computers from ILM and plugged them in at the Main House. A rough 3-D Jar Jar model allowed Lucas, Chiang's concept team, and Campbell's modelers to experiment with and finalize the physical characteristics and facial expressions that would define the character.

"It's basically like working with clay, where we take a roughed-out model and are actually sculpting in the computer," Campbell explained. "ILM has a software team that provides software packages that allow us to sculpt quickly and in real time. [Concept artist] Iain McCaig was doing terrific sketches of Jar Jar expressions and we'd take those drawings and sculpt furiously. We'd just keep going over the model with changes. We sculpturally defined how far the character could go before it went 'off-model' and became something uncharacteristic of what the character was supposed to be."

Case in point were concept drawings featuring a long, crocodile shaped mouth, which was deemed too unwieldy and made smaller in the computer model. "There was a phase of figuring out how happy-go-lucky or goofy he was going to be," Campbell recalled. "We also tried things such as having the structure

of his teeth and gums change when he smiled, but that proved too unrealistic. All these alien type ideas would be proposed, then thrown out, as slowly the character was brought back to reality."

Although the lighting, compositing, and other concerns would come later in the production timeline, the pre-production phase was vital for making sure the model could withstand the creative rigors ahead. "Pre-production is important because we want to make sure the character can be put into various environments," explained CG supervisor Smythe. "In pre-production we work out all the physical characteristics for every inch of his body. What's his color and [skin] reflectivity? Is his body smooth or bumpy? There are a bunch of these nitty-gritty issues which we test in different lighting environments to make sure they'll work."

A CG character takes shape when geometric points in the computer are moved and fused into "patches"—solid shapes that are the building blocks of a form. A CG character's figure is also given "armature," literally a skeleton complete with joint placements that allow animators to bend an arm, swivel a head, and generally replicate mechanics of motion.

"During the modeling phase a TD [technical director] will take the model as it's nearing completion and run it through a process we call 'turntable,'" Smythe added. "On our end a digital painter would match the painted sculpture, we'd add basic lighting, and then rotate the model to judge the paint work and evaluate what would be needed to take it from a physical sculpture to something that looks like a living, breathing character."

Ultimately, the potential range and quality of the performance an animator can get out of a CG model is based on the physical characteristics pre-set by the modelers. Key to giving Jar Jar a jolt of life force were libraries of facial shapes and expressions, everything from eye blinks to the phonemic lip-syncs that would make it look like Jar Jar was pronouncing every word of his dialogue.

"We'd sculpt and set up hundreds of shapes, so the possibilities for the animators were pretty endless," Campbell noted. "The idea is these animation shapes could overlap, that animators could mix from a palette of facial expressions. For example, instead of a straight smile pose, you could have eyes blink on frame 50, and two frames later start going into his smile."

» Computer wireframe of Jar Jar Binks.



JAR JAR BINKS, MEET AHMED, BEST

WHILE THE CONCEPT ARTISTS AND CG MODELERS were setting the stage for the animators, Lucas' live-action photography was already accounting for the eventual integration of the synthetic creation. Interacting on set and location with Liam Neeson, Ewan McGregor, and the other actors was Jar Jar's other half, the very live Ahmed Best, an acclaimed theatrical performer who also contributed the Gungan's voice.

For Jar Jar shots, Lucas shot two versions of the same scene—the first with Best dressed in a rough Gungan costume and interacting with the actors, the second repeated with the live performers acting to an invisible character. In most final takes, Best was primarily a reference for determining size relations and key poses, with the CG animation added to the “clean” footage.

Sometimes Lucas liked the dynamics when Best was performing alongside the other actors, so animators created final animation for that footage, which required digitally removing Best from the scene and replacing him with the final animation.

“George understood the necessity of having actors on set who were going to be replaced later,” Coleman noted. “If you’re acting to nothing your eyes tend to wander, but with Ahmed on set, Liam and Ewan had someone to act to, so eyelines could match [with the digital actor added later] and the timing would be there during exchanges of dialogue.”

Although Lucas directed Best as if he were Jar Jar, no human, even in a creature suit, could move with ease and match the unusual Gungan body type. “Ahmed is a very physical guy and can do amazing things with his body, but we wanted to stretch Jar Jar even more,” Coleman noted. “George told me to think of Jar Jar as not having bones but cartilage, and talked at length about the need to make Jar Jar magical, other-worldly.”



» (LEFT) Ahmed Best in the motion-capture suit.

GET TO THE ESSENCE OF THE GUNGAN

4 EVERY DIGITAL CHARACTER IN THE MOVIE had its own animation team—and Jar Jar, with the most shots, had the biggest team: 15 animators. Within the character team, CG artists were assigned according to their strengths, such as those skilled in physical action handling Jar Jar's slapstick moments, while animators with a talent for lip sync were given the character's heavy dialogue scenes.

“You’ve got 15 different personalities and styles that have to bring one character to life—it’s like running with a team of horses,” Coleman observed. “And any digital actor you’re putting into a live set is a challenge, because you have the immediate reference of a real person. With Jar Jar, you’ve got this goofy, amphibian digital character that doesn’t really exist yet must hold a scene with great actors.”

For Lucas, the logistics of dealing with a digital actor meant every nuance of acting in any given scene was communicated to the animation team through Coleman and lead Jar Jar animator Lou Dellarosa. Twice a week and throughout the production, Coleman met with Lucas for an ongoing dialogue on the digital characters. “In Jar Jar’s case we discussed the arc of his action in the movie, what Jar Jar learns, what he’s doing, and where he’s going—all the questions you’d explore with ‘real’ actors,” Coleman explained.

One of the realities of a freshly minted model is the inevitable learning curve animators must ride out before coming to a complete understanding of a character. Through the mechanics of motion and libraries of expression pre-set by the modelers, the animation team had to manipulate every gesture, every eye-blink, and make it all “read” as distinctly Jar Jar. With the large Jar Jar animation team it took almost three months of daily meetings before everyone found “common ground,” according to Coleman.

“You get to that moment where everybody understands the essence of Jar Jar,” Coleman recalled, “where it’s obvious if some animation isn’t right. One of the distinctive things about Jar Jar is his physicality. As a starting point, George told me to look at the great Buster Keaton, who did physical comedy with a deadpan look on his face. There’s this happy-clown thing to Buster, that he takes whatever the world gives him. Jar Jar is a mixture of Buster, Chaplin, Jerry Lewis, and all the comic icons of our culture.”

“But he’s different from them, too. He bumbles along, helping the Jedi because he has the world experience of Naboo that they need, but he doesn’t really connect the dots. He always wants to know what’s going on but never really does.”

GET INTO THE GUNGAN'S HEAD

ALTHOUGH THE FINAL COMPUTER ANIMATION would be scanned out to film at the "high-resolution" image detail needed for the big screen, the animators worked with a "low-resolution" Jar Jar model. When assigned a scene, animators received a video of the live action sequence which included Ahmed Best's reference performance. For completely computer generated environments into which Jar Jar animation would be placed, such as the climactic ground battle, the animators had online panels of drawn storyboard art for inspiration. (For totally CG scenes, the animators could still call up Best footage from other live action scenes for reference.)

5 Before animation, each animator mentally prepared for their virtual performance. A classic way of getting into the mood of a scene was to sketch out on paper the possible key poses. Kevin Martel, whose animation of Jar Jar getting zapped by a Podracer energy bolt appeared in the film's first theatrical trailer, also favored videotaping himself acting out a scene and then studying the result.

Some animators found inspiration in Keaton, Chaplin, and company, but Jar Jar lead Dellarosa detected a kindred spirit in another gangly cartoon character. "There's some Buster Keaton in Jar Jar but, I have to say that there's a little bit of Goofy also," Dellarosa laughed. "Jar Jar's got the same kind of goofy walk—but without looking ridiculous. We can't push things the way you would in traditional cartoon animation, otherwise the movements would be out of the context of live action."

Still, Dellarosa, like others, came to the 3-D world from traditional animation. Before arriving at ILM, Dellarosa worked at Disney's Orlando animation studio on such characters as the villainous Jafar of *Aladdin* and the cackling hyenas in *The Lion King*.

"I'd learned all the traditional animation techniques, so 3-D animation seemed like the logical next step," Dellarosa smiled. "But it was when I was



» Jar Jar Binks encounters the Jedi Knights

working on Draco in *Dragonheart* that I realized computer animation is a different medium altogether! In traditional animation you can draw to what looks good, but in a 3-D world, we all have to work with an existing model. In traditional animation you can cheat things like scale, but in the 3-D world the digital actor has to always be kept in scale with the live actors."

Martel, who graduated to *Phantom Menace* from Sheridan College, a famed animation school in Toronto, agreed. "Animating a CG figure is kind of like being a puppeteer, but it's also unlike anything else," he said. "Sometimes you feel like you're in there with the character, and sometimes you wish you could just reach in, grab him, and move him into position!"

A typical, painstaking animation sequence would begin with "blocking" the rough movements that Lucas could then comment on or approve. From there, the animators continually refined and developed the key poses. Although the computer could automatically do the "in-between" movements of each key pose, even those interpolations required hands-on animation.

"It's not a matter of going from pose to pose," noted Dellarosa. "We'd go into the interpolations and further refine and place secondary actions so the final movement had more believability. Anyone can move things around—it's how you do it. It's the timing and composition. You have to know how Jar Jar fits into a shot."

THE GUNGAN GETS INTO YOUR HEAD

AS THE CREATIVE JOURNEY PROGRESSED, and the animators began to understand the creature's alien nature, the Gungan got under their skin and into their subconscious. "I found myself walking around my apartment swinging my arms all loosey-goosey like Jar Jar," Martel chuckled. "Sometimes he even got into my dreams—which is when you know you've been sitting at the computer a little too long! But he definitely became a part of me. Understanding a character is a big part of animating him."

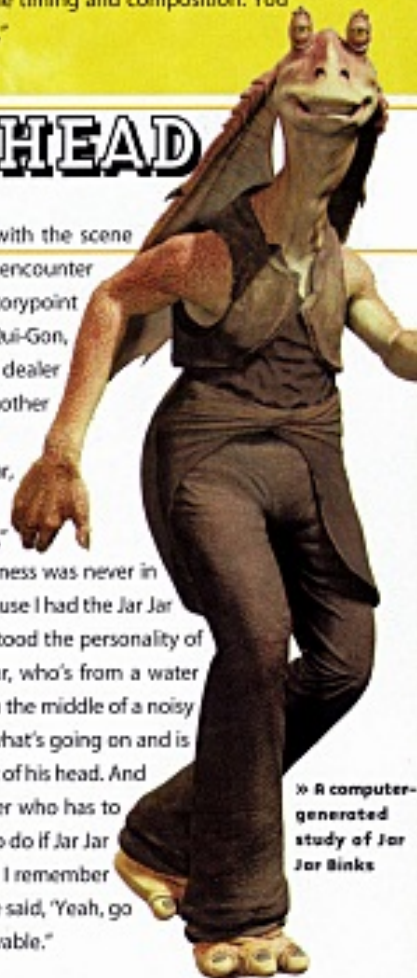
"I guess animation is like being an actor without the glamour," Martel continued. "We'd get a scene from Rob and he'd communicate what needed to be done. We'd learn our lines, because there's a lot of dialogue to deal with, then try to give our best performance. Each scene became its own challenge. But ultimately he [Lucas] knew what he wanted and continually communicated that to us."

Martel said he found that one of his biggest challenges was making Jar Jar move believably. "The hardest part of animating Jar Jar was making it look like he's thinking and not just moving around," he said. "A lot can be communicated through the eyes. The goal throughout was to make it look like there was a connection between his brain and his limbs, that he was a living, breathing thing."

And just as real actors get into the persona of their characters, and sometimes improvise a scene, so too were the Phantom animators able to play off the digital actors and sometimes go beyond the original concept

for specific scenes. Such was the case with the scene when Liam Neeson's Qui-Gon and Jar Jar encounter Watto in the Podrace hangar. When a storypoint called for the winged Watto to fly past Qui-Gon, Coleman considered having the junk dealer buzz behind the Jedi—but then had another inspiration.

"Watto, who doesn't care for Jar Jar, flies around Qui-Gon and pushes Jar Jar in the chest to get him out of the way," Coleman explained. "This little bit of business was never in the storyboards, but became natural because I had the Jar Jar and Watto teams in my head and understood the personality of the two characters. Here you have Jar Jar, who's from a water planet, and now he's on a desert planet in the middle of a noisy room and, once again, he doesn't know what's going on and is tucked behind this Jedi Master, scared out of his head. And there's this other, curmudgeonly character who has to fly around Qui-Gon and what's he going to do if Jar Jar is in the way? Knock the guy in the head! I remember suggesting the moment to George and he said, 'Yeah, go for it!' It was real—the moment was believable."



» A computer-generated study of Jar Jar Binks

THE FINISHING TOUCHES

ANY ANIMATED FILM IS A LONG, LABORIOUS PROCESS. Jar Jar

alone required nearly two years of animation—indeed, it began way back in November 1997 when the digital actor was first added to scenes (although it wasn't until the end of April 1998 that Lucas "finished" the first Jar Jar shot). The reality of such a long creative timeline is that animation inevitably gets better as time goes by.

One of the unwritten rules is to never begin animation with what will be the character's first appearance, as that introductory scene is vital to "selling" a character and merits the peak animation performance. Thus, the Jar Jar animation process began with the Gungan in Watto's shop on Tatooine, a sequence slated to appear toward the middle of the movie.

The Jar Jar team thought they'd nailed the complex character that first time, but later in the production timeline, Coleman took another look at those first shots in Watto's shop and tagged a few as "CBB"—"Could Be Better." It was with pride that Coleman said he got some of those first shots back, with animators able to return to the seminal scenes and bring the animation up to the high standard of the subsequent Jar Jar shots.

As animation was completed, other functions vital to finaling a shot



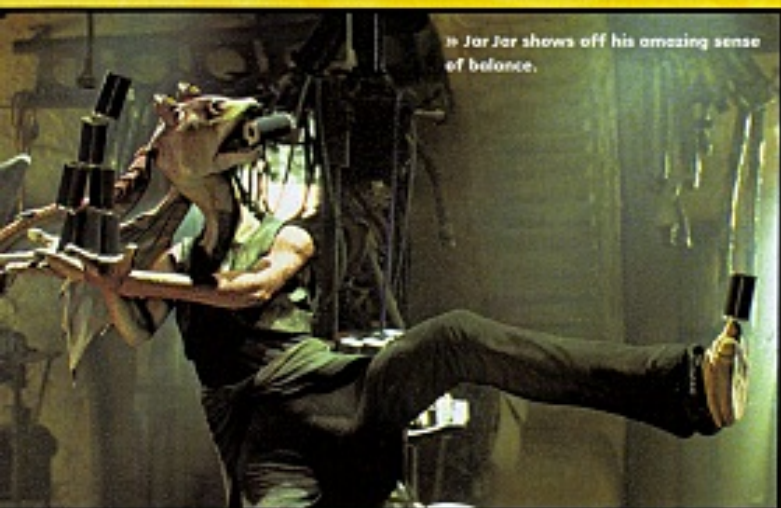
» Jar Jar Binks in a moment of panic.

were begun, sometimes concurrently if the animation work was far enough along. One of the final acts in the animation stage was adding digital clothing, an ILM breakthrough given that the company's previous CG characters included a dragon, ghosts, dinosaurs, and other creations that didn't need clothes.

ILM's in-house "cloth simulation" software allowed the computer to automatically conform the outer clothing to Jar Jar's movements. To save time, a library of painted wrinkle elements was created and textured onto the cloth. The simulation package also automatically generated the subtle movements of Jar Jar's floppy ears, a time saver for animators who could concentrate on creating the overall performance and not worry about keeping the ears active in each shot.

Technical directors handled the virtual lighting for the digital actor, a process with all the tools, and none of the physical constraints, of a real cinematographer. "Every CG light source has a position and direction in [virtual] space, so we place them around the animation model to mimic the direction of the light sources—whatever it takes to fit Jar Jar into the scene," CG supervisor Smythe explained. "You can set the color and brightness of the lights, even do things impossible in the real world, like control which objects cast shadows."

Then comes the final computing, or rendering, of the digital image and its compositing into a scene. "There's usually an overlap, because before we're finished getting the lighting exactly right we'll start putting the character into the scene," Smythe noted. "You want to see the character within the context of the shot to judge the lighting."



» Jar Jar shows off his amazing sense of balance.

RELEASE THE GUNGAN

AS THE PRODUCTION WOUND DOWN, the Jar Jar team realized they'd soon be letting go of a character that had become their creative obsession. Kevin Martel, for one, left Jar Jar back on the battlefield of Naboo. "My final Jar Jar shot was of him in the ground battle, flailing his arms and afraid as always," Martel smiled. "For me there was a sense of loss at the end, but it was also a fantastic feeling that this character we'd been hanging out with for years was going to be introduced to the world."

"It's almost a shame to stop working on a character, particularly one you've been working with for a while," said Smythe. "I don't know if Jar Jar's going to make an appearance in any future movies—that's up to George to decide. But if he does, it'll be like saying 'hi' to an old friend."

Concluded Coleman, "ILM has become a specialist in combining

[CG] animation and live action—we're in this new realm—and in my mind Jar Jar is at the next level of sophistication, light-years away from Draco. What makes Jar Jar the next generation of digital actor is the subtlety of control in his facial features, the experience of the animators, and the ability to do the simulation of clothing and ear movements. We were able to get the life force into that body."

Mark Cotta Vax is a senior contributor to *Cinefex* magazine. He's authored ten books, including *From Star Wars to Indiana Jones: The Best of the Lucasfilm Archives* and *Industrial Light & Magic: Into the Digital Realm*. He wrote about the digital effects of the *Star Wars* Special Edition in *Insider* #32.

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SOLD ONLY TRACKSIDE AND THROUGH THE JAWA TRADER, this ultra cool Jeff Gordon Pit Crew hat has more embroidery than any hat we've ever sold. The Star Wars: Episode I logo and a galaxy of shooting stars embroidered in silver and white are on the front. Pepsi racing symbol is embroidered on the right side. White star trails and the NASCAR symbol are embroidered on the left. #24 and Jeff Gordon's signature are embroidered in red and white on the back. Hat has a plastic adjustable band in the back. Less than 900 available! **WCL 0010 \$25.00**



100% cotton, have two-sided Jeff Gordon racing designs!

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The Official Star Wars Fan Club is proud to offer four new Power of the Force carded action figures as North American exclusives. Hasbro has made available to us these 4 carded figures that would not have otherwise shipped with regular assortments. These figures are being produced in limited numbers. These figures will not be available in stores—you can only order them through the

Jawa Trader. Each figure comes carded with Freeze Frame packaging. Sold in sets of two. Free Action Stand with each of these figures.

WTY0129 Pote Snitkin & AT-AT Driver \$19.95

WTY0130 Leia in Hoth Gear & Death Star Droid \$19.95

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Place your Episode I figures on the COMMTECH reader and hear them speak! Reader comes with exclusive COMMTECH chip and can store phrases for later playback.

WTY5010 \$21.95



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FIGURES
SPEAK!**

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NEW!



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WTY0224
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WTY0226
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WTY0225 OOM-9
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STAR WARS CELEBRATION



BACK

FRONT

STAR WARS CELEBRATION LEATHER JACKET

Exquisite in his evil, a menacing Darth Maul embroidery adorns the back of this high quality, black leather jacket. Coat is a letterman design with wool body, leather sleeves and neck, and quilted interior. Star Wars Celebration logo, location and dates are embroidered in red on the front. One of the hottest items at the Celebration and only around for a very limited time! Order yours today!

WCL 1003 LG LARGE
WCL 1003 XL X-LARGE
WCL 1003 X2 XX-LARGE
\$295.00 EACH



FRONT



PODRACING JACKET

Sold for the first time at the Star Wars Celebration, the Podracer jacket is designed with the racing pit crew in mind. Mid-length, wind and water-resistant, red vinyl jacket has a black lining; a large Podracing logo is embroidered on the back; a rubberized Podracer logo is on the right sleeve, with a rubberized Star Wars Episode I logo on the left sleeve.

WCL 1004 SM SMALL
WCL 1004 MD MEDIUM
WCL 1004 LG LARGE
WCL 1004 XL X-LARGE
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FRONT



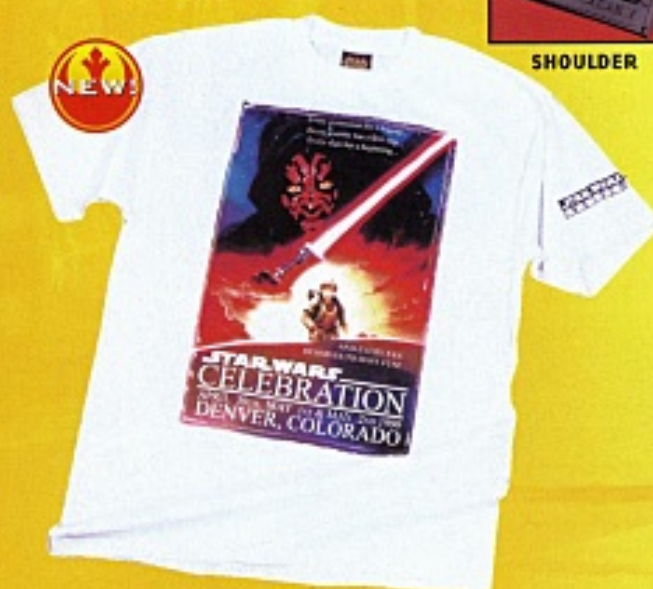
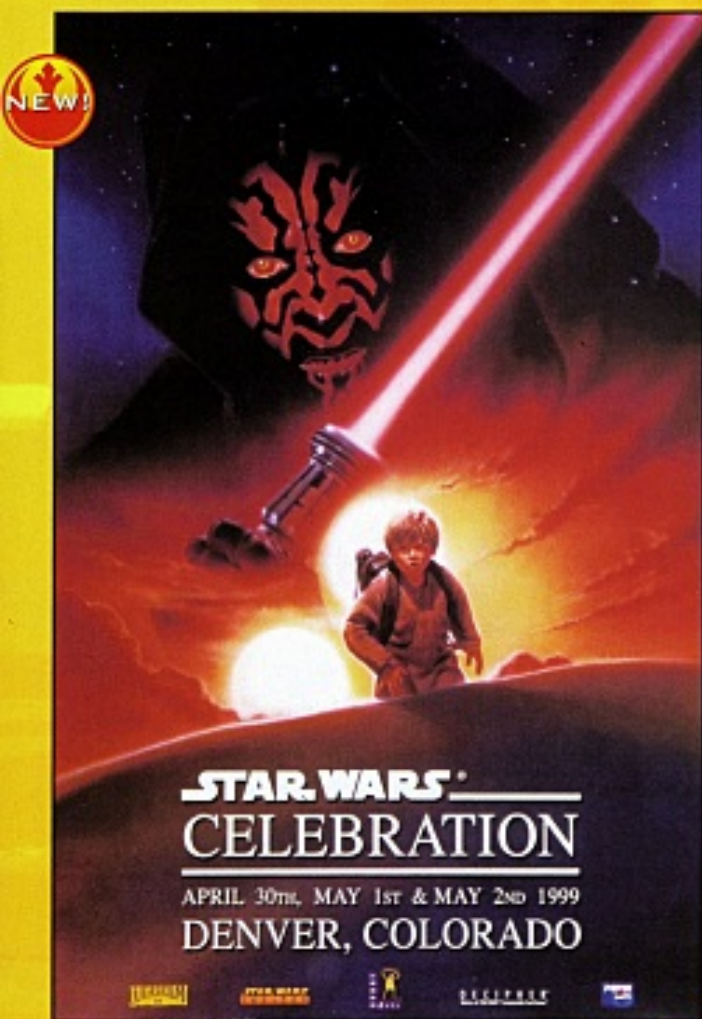
BACK



SHOULDER



SLEEVE



BACK

STAR WARS CELEBRATION T-SHIRT

Made exclusively for the Star Wars Celebration, this 100% cotton white T-shirt features the Celebration poster art of Jon Alvin on the front and the worldwide release dates of the movie in concert tour format on the back, available in adult and children's sizes.

ADULT:
WCL 4041LG LARGE
WCL 4041XL X-LARGE
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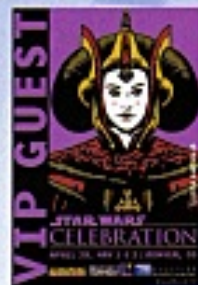
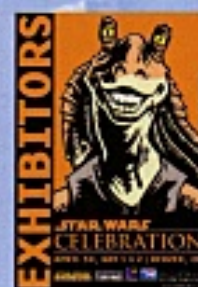
CHILD:
WCL 4042 MD MEDIUM
WCL 4042 LG LARGE
\$10.00

« STAR WARS CELEBRATION POSTER

Darth Maul glares from the night, lightsaber ready, as young Anakin Skywalker trudges toward his fate. Poster measures 24" x 36" and has the Celebration logo, location and dates on the bottom.

WPL 0022 \$15.00

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COMES IN DECORATIVE BLACK BOX WITH CLEAR TOP AND FOIL AUTHENTICITY SEAL.

signed!



EXHIBITOR PASS IS SIGNED ON THE BACK BY AHMED BEST!

STAR WARS CELEBRATION PASSES SET

One of the biggest requests at the Star Wars Celebration was for a set of all ten convention passes. Now you can own this very limited edition reissue collection complete with lanyard! Pass set includes Three Day/ Darth Maul, Friday/ Obi-Wan Kenobi, Saturday/ Qui-Gon Jinn, Sunday/ Anakin Skywalker, Exhibitors/ Jar Jar, Volunteer/ Battle Droid, Backstage/ Pit Droid, VIP/ Queen Amidala, Staff/ C-3PO, and All Access/ Sebulba. Each pass measures 4.5" x 3.5" and are laminated. Lanyard is yellow with a repeating black Episode I and Sony logo and is the actual lanyard used at the Celebration. Exclusive to this set is the Ahmed Best (Jar Jar) signed Exhibitor Pass. Passes and lanyard come in a decorative black box with clear top and foil authenticity seal.

WCG0000 \$48.00

Exclusive!



THE PHANTOM MENACE CD ROM

Take on the role of Jedi Master, Qui-Gon Jinn, his apprentice Obi-Wan Kenobi, Young Queen Amidala or her loyal military leader, Captain Panaka as you become a part of the episode that begins an epic. Use your Jedi powers to defeat battle droids, your wits and cunning to outsmart opponents, travel to exotic Episode I places, interact with hundreds of creatures and characters from Star Wars worlds and take your quest well beyond the realm of any "Phantom Menace". Game requires Windows 95/98, Direct X compatible computer, 200 MHz Pentium or faster, 32MB RAM, 4MB PCI or AGP direct 3D graphics accelerator, 16 bit sound card, Quad speed CD-ROM.

WCA 1006 \$50.00



EPISODE I RACER CD ROM

Relive the thrill and excitement of the Podrace from Episode I. Feel the burn as your Podracer maxes out at 600+ mph as you compete for space with more than 20 other opponents! Avoid hazards such as methane lakes, meteor showers and Tusken Raiders. Spectacular 3D environments take you to over 21 tracks on 8 different worlds. Now this is Podracing! Game requires Windows 95/98, 166 MHz CPU or faster, 32MB RAM, 4MB PCI or AGP direct 3D graphics accelerator, 16 bit sound card, Quad speed IDE or SCSI CD-ROM, joystick recommended. Multi-player support through LAN.

WCA 1008 \$50.00



EPISODE I INSIDER'S GUIDE CD ROM

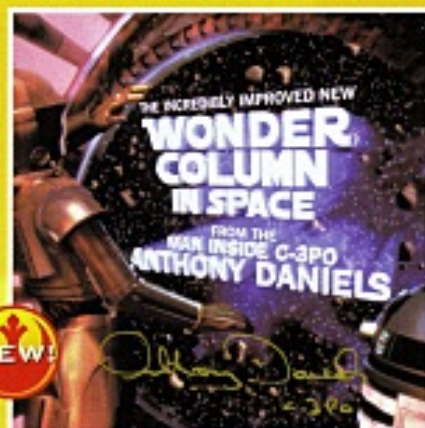
This Star Wars: Episode I tour includes: interviews with George Lucas and the production team; 2,000+ images of concept art, "making of" shots, photo stills and more; Theatrical trailers, selected film footage, and audio clips. Over 300 pieces of original art, including 3D models, an annotated screenplay, extensive glossary, hundreds of trivia questions and surprises galore! WINDOWS: 95/98, Direct X compatible computer, 133 MHz Pentium or faster, 16 MB RAM, PCI graphics card, Direct X compatible 16 bit sound card, Quad speed IDE or SCSI CD-ROM. CPU: iMac G3/233 or higher. MAC: System 7.6.1 or later. RAM: 32MB RAM minimum with virtual memory on. CD-ROM: Quad speed CD-ROM drive required. Display: 640x480 monitor or greater with thousands of colors displayable.

WCA1005 WINDOWS \$34.00
WCA1005MAC MACINTOSH \$34.00

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Relive the adventure of *Star Wars* through the eyes and words of C-3PO himself. Anthony Daniels weaves a wondrous tale of backstage antics, outrageous outtakes, and secrets that never made it to the screen. From overheated Jawas to "Ewoks, the plague" join C-3PO as he pilots you through the perils of making the greatest cinematic epic of all time.

WAV2014 \$20.00

WAV2014SIG

Signed by Anthony Daniels \$45.00



EPISODE I MOVIE SOUNDTRACK

Recorded at Abbey Roads studios, John Williams conducts the London Symphony Orchestra bringing you this Episode I soundtrack on an exceptional high note.

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Consult with the most forceful council in the galaxy with the Jedi Council deck. The Young Jedi collectible card game is easy to learn and fun to collect. Booster box allows you to increase your abilities and powers as you use the Force for good!

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WCG4015 YOUNG JEDI STARTER DECK \$10.00

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« SITH INFILTRATOR UNIVERSAL REMOTE

Need a change in channel changers? This Sith Infiltrator Universal Remote will give you the force you need to find something more exciting to watch! Remote features extensive programming libraries for TV, VCR, Cable, Satellite dishes, and DVD. Plus, memory retention (after battery charge) and genuine Episode I sound effects.

WHS 2006 \$40.00



INTERACTIVE BANKS

Feel the power... of interactive entertainment! Each of these banks contains a computer chip and recites lines from Episode I, but the fun doesn't stop there! They interact with one another! Pair any two banks and the figures fight or train together. When all the banks are linked, Darth Maul takes on Obi-Wan and Qui-Gon in the never ending battle between Sith and Jedi. Each figure wields a lightsaber and stands atop a coin-collecting container. Who will win this costly battle? You can count on a forceful conclusion! Each electronic figure bank measures approximately 11" x 10" x 15". Batteries are included.

WHS2003 OBI-WAN KENOBI \$30.00

WHS2004 QUI-GON JINN \$30.00

WHS2007 SET OF ALL THREE \$80.00



WCG 2011



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QUI-GON JINN »
COLLECTOR SERIES
VINYL DOLL
WFG 2008 \$50.00



ROYAL ELEGANCE QUEEN AMIDALA DOLL

Every Queen needs to have an interchangeable wardrobe! Create six different fashions from Amidala's Theed palace dress with this royal elegance 12" doll. Queen Amidala has life-like hair and comes with real cloth clothing, accessories and fun fashion hair extensions.

WTY 0208 \$34.00



HIDDEN MAJESTY QUEEN AMIDALA DOLL

Discover the secret as this 12" doll transforms from Padmé to Queen Amidala right before your eyes. Doll comes with Padmé mask, and has life-like hair and cloth clothing. An excellent, high quality doll for display or playtime.

WTY0207 \$30.00



PORTRAIT EDITION QUEEN AMIDALA DOLL

An exquisite doll for the discerning collector. Queen Amidala is clothed in a textured-velvet, ebony robe with golden tricot bodice yoke, sleeves and skirt that featured an ebony lace overlay. Her hood is a satin finish tricot, complete with feathers, red "gemstones" (plastic) and filigree ear coverings. Queen Amidala comes in dual window box packaging. This 14" figure is the embodiment of regal elegance!

WTY 0211 \$69.00



DESTROYER DROID ROOM ALARM

Droid assumes attack position and an alarm goes off when it detects intruders with its heat sensors. It has a four-foot detection range and three built-in, authentic sound effects. You won't have to worry about invasion with this sentry on duty!

WTY 5004 \$55.00



JAR JAR PLUSH ALARM

Get a jump on the morning with Jar Jar Binks. Soft, life-like Jar Jar figure stands nearly two feet tall, speaks over 40 phrases, giggles and wiggles with excitement, and tells you the time! Set even comes with a pit droid clock! Batteries are included.

WHS 0003 \$35.00



ELECTRONIC TATOOINE BLASTER

Go well armed when visiting the sparsely populated world of Tatooine, you're not the only one trying not to be found! Electronic blaster has two laser sound effects, features realistic-looking battle damage and movie styling, and measures 11" x 2" long x 6.5" wide.

WTY 3007 \$19.00

NABOO FOAM FIRING BLASTER (NOT SHOWN)

Take out a battle droid, stuffed animal, or the refrigerator with the Naboo Blaster. Foam firing toy has dual scopes and a sight for accurate targeting. Firing button is on the side of the blaster. Set includes three foam projectiles with safety suction cups. Toy gun is 8.5" long x 5" high.

WTY 3006 \$13.00



ANAKIN PODRACER WITH FIGURE

Anakin Skywalker saves the day for his Jedi friends when he wins the Boonta Eve Podrace. Be a part of the excitement with this 19" long, real action Anakin Podracer! Engines are attached with a thin wire for air flight look. Directional vanes and air brakes function with the push of a button. Special Anakin figure is only available with this ship!

WTY0233 \$34.00



SEBULBA PODRACER WITH FIGURE

Sebulba is determined to win this race no matter who pays the cost. Super sneaky Podracer measures 19" in length! Podracer engines are attached with a thin wire for air flight look. Press the button and a roto blade pops from the side of the racer. Special Sebulba figure is only available with this ship!

WTY0234 \$34.00

subscriber's only supplement

PREQUEL UPDATE EXTRA

WITH RICK MCCALLUM by Don Madsen

» **Exclusive!** Exclusive! This members-only Prequel Update, conducted weeks after the Prequel Update on page 58, can only be found in this special subscribers' only edition!

Rick, when do you think we will see Episode I released on video?

We're discussing that right now, and I hope to have an answer for you by September.

There have been a lot of rumors lately about the possibility of Leonardo DiCaprio being considered for the role of Anakin Skywalker in Episodes II and III. That rumor began, I believe, when fans found out he had visited Skywalker Ranch recently. What can you tell us about this?

I met Leo on the set of *Titanic*. I knew he was a big *Star Wars* fan. You know, he has a collection, and *Star Wars* was a big movie to him. He just finished making *The Beach*, and he was very anxious to see Episode I in one of the best surroundings. He had just done some post-production work at Skywalker Sound as well. He wanted to see the film, and we wanted to show it to him in the best possible way. Leo is a great actor but, at this time, there was nothing more to his visit than showing him the film.

When will shooting begin on Episode II?
June, 2000.

Will you begin shooting in Australia?

Yes, we will begin in Australia. We will probably return to Tunisia and Italy for location shooting as well.

I know George must have filled you in on the storyline for Episode II.

Well, I've known the basic storyline for years, but recently George sat down with the art department and filled them in on the story for Episode II, since they have begun design work. He gave them enough to start work on this summer for the conceptual art department, which includes Doug Chiang and Iain McCaig, and Gavin Bocquet and myself. We are hard at work on Episode II as we speak. Gavin and I will be in Europe for the next couple of weeks and

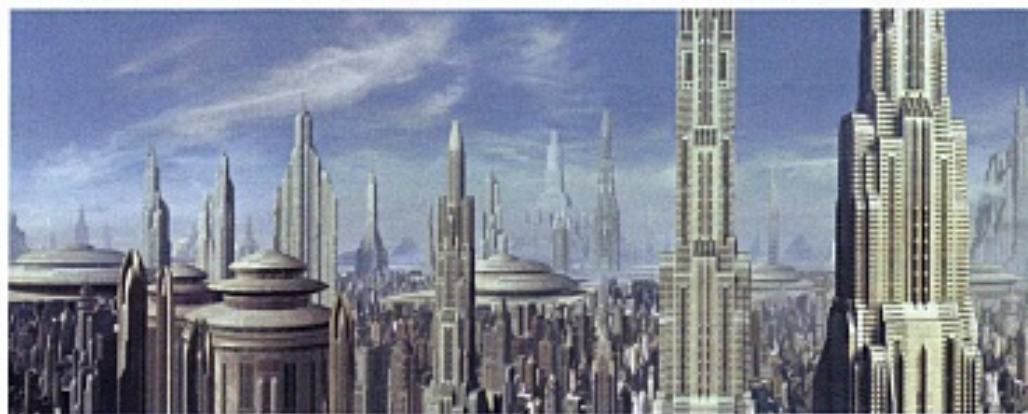
then we'll spend the summer trying to lock down our locations and everything else.

What is your reaction to some of the criticism towards Jar Jar Binks?

For kids, there is no doubt that Jar Jar is their favorite character. This is something that we have not only seen in research but in exit polls, and I have seen it at screenings I have been to. People love Jar Jar! I don't know what is going

There have been several cameos noticed in Episode I. One, in particular, caught fans' attention—the "E.T." creatures in the Senate Chamber scene. How did that come about?

A lot of the things Steven Spielberg has done included a *Star Wars* reference, and George wanted to do the same. That's just something they each have done over the years. We placed those CG E.T.s in there as a nod to Steven, but there are Wookiees in there, as well, and other characters fans should look for.



"WE OBVIOUSLY KNOW NOW what Coruscant looks like and Naboo and on and on, and that helps us out enormously [for Episode II]."

on. I think there is too much criticism. There have even been racist accusations about Jar Jar. That is ridiculous. Jar Jar was created with great care and affection and was meant to be a lovable, innocent character. To read anything more into his creation is ridiculous and absurd. It is a small percentage of people who are savage about it.

One of the things that fans talk about is how upset they are that Darth Maul was killed in the film. Any chance Darth Maul will rear his ugly head again in Episode II?
No, but if you liked Darth Maul, wait until Episode II—you will not believe what is in store for you!

What else is happening on Episode II?

We'll start casting September, October and November. We're in active pre-production. We don't have much time, so we are trying to catch up and work as hard as we can because the train has already left and we have to be on it! We started earlier on Episode I but that was because we were developing a lot of the technology that allowed us to do the digital characters in the first place. We obviously know now what Coruscant looks like and Naboo and on and on, and that helps us out enormously. We're shifting our attention to Episode II, as it is really requiring our full effort now. ☺

A Naboo starfighter in the heat of battle against the Trade Federation.



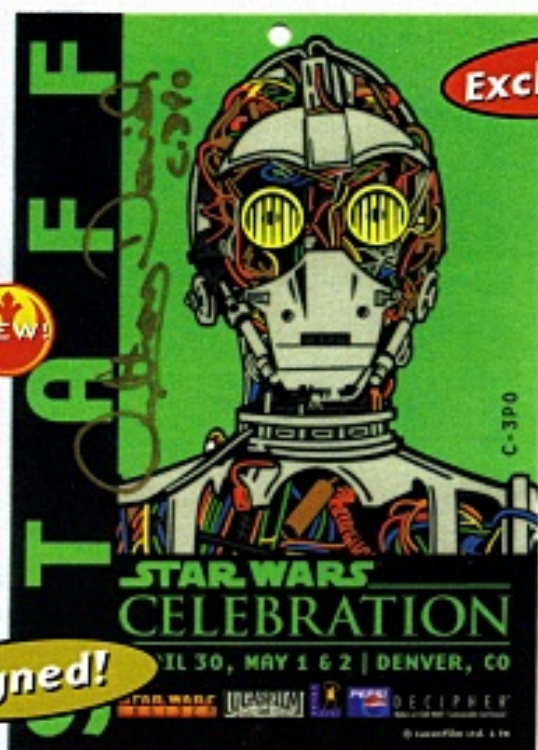
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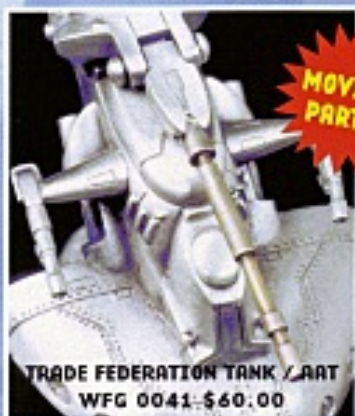
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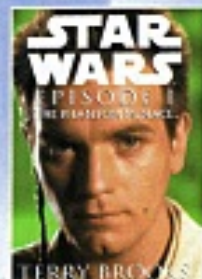
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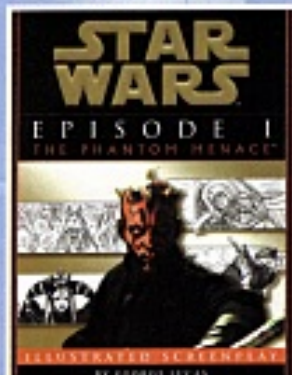
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summer 1999

STAR NEWS

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FROM THE WORLD OF LUCASFILM



photo: Scott Chernoff

DENNIS MUREN

» Gets First FX Star on Walk of Fame

Dennis Muren, whose groundbreaking visual effects work has helped set the pace for innovation through such films as *Jurassic Park*, *Terminator 2*, *The Abyss*, and all four *Star Wars* movies, blazed a new trail off-screen on June 3, when he became the first visual effects artist to be honored with a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame.

"I feel very honored by the film community and all my fans to be recognized by the Hollywood Chamber of Commerce," Muren said moments after his star was unveiled. "It's not just for me—it's for all the other effects practitioners. We've been doing this work for 80 years, and now we're getting recognized."

Muren's star was unveiled at a star-studded ceremony attended by George Lucas, 72 director James Cameron, special effects pioneer Ray

Harryhausen (*Seventh Voyage of Sinbad*, *Jason and the Argonauts*), A New Hope creature artist Rick Baker, Lucas Digital president Jim Morris, and Muren's droid colleagues, C-3PO and R2-D2. The star is located between the stars of actor Ray Bolger (*The Wizard of Oz*) and actress Kay Francis (*Muslon*, *Little Men*), on Hollywood Boulevard at the corner of Highland in front of the Guinness Museum of World Records. The Museum is the former site of the oldest theater on the boulevard, the Hollywood Theater—the same place where Muren's first film, *The Equinox*, debuted in 1957.

Although his star is the 2,137th star on the famed sidewalk, Muren is the first honored for visual effects. But after years of honoring actors, singers, and directors, the Walk of Fame committee could no longer ignore Muren's

achievements, especially in the wake of *The Phantom Menace*. Noted honorary Hollywood Mayor Johnny Grant, "Today, we recognize a man who has received more Academy Awards (8) than any living person."

George Lucas flew in from Japan, where he was promoting Episode I, to honor Muren. "From the day Dennis started working for me," Lucas said, "you could tell by seeing his dailies that he was special. It's the kind of talent that's hard to describe, but when his dailies came through, you could always tell which ones were his—the angles were a little bit better, the lighting was a little bit better. Everything seemed to glow a little bit with his hand. I'm really honored to be here to help him celebrate this moment."

Lucas said immortalizing Muren in the Walk of Fame represents an important turning point in film history. "It's a real pleasure to be here today," he said, "especially because not only does this honor a great friend of mine, and an extremely talented and creative filmmaker, but it also recognizes the world of special effects. We've come a long way in the last 25 years to get the

acknowledgement that special effects is a true art form, and I'm grateful the whole artform has come into its own."

Cameron echoed Lucas' sentiments. "The human imagination working directly through these visual effects people has been such a huge part of the success of Hollywood for its entire history," he said. "You have all these stars here honoring individuals for their acting, but this is the first time there's been an acknowledgement of this other side of visual imagination that really needs to be respected."

Asked for his thoughts on Muren's work on *The Phantom Menace*, Cameron told the *Insider*, "It's cool—it is a visual wonder, absolutely."

But no one was more proud of Dennis Muren than his mom, Charlene McDermott. "Everything he has done, he has done on his own," she beamed. "Dennis went out and knocked on the studio doors and got odd jobs doing visual effects before he got to work on the first *Star Wars* picture. We bought the equipment he needed, but he's completely self-taught." ☺

Digital Phantom Menace Launches Bicoastal Invasion

Making good on a pledge to bring motion picture exhibition into the digital age within a month of Episode I's general release (*Star Wars Insider* #44), Lucasfilm opened *Star Wars: Episode I The Phantom Menace* in four theaters in the New York and Los Angeles areas using the new, film-less digital technology on June 18 for a four-week run. Analysts said the limited runs could not only speed the implementation of digital exhibition but also help determine which of two different projection systems would become the industry standard.

"This is a milestone in cinematic history," declared *Star Wars* producer Rick McCallum. "Like the introduction of sound and color, these digital screenings represent the beginning of a new era in film presentation. Digital projection guarantees a perfect print with each and every screening for the full life of the film, and for every copy that is made." In other words—a clean, crystal clear image, precisely as the filmmaker intended, from all angles.

In the Los Angeles area, AMC's Burbank 14 Theater was chosen to show *The Phantom Menace* using the new digital projection system developed by Texas Instruments, and Pacific's Winnetka Theater in suburban Chatsworth was selected to showcase digital exhibition technology created by CineComm Digital Cinema. In the New York region, Loews' Meadows 6 in Secaucus, New Jersey, hosted Texas Instruments, and Loews' Route 4 Paramus was retrofitted with a CineComm digital projector.

At all four theaters, the movie was not projected from film reels but rather from 18Gb hard disks (18 of them) located in a digital video recorder developed by Denver-based Pluto Technologies International. And instead of a traditional



SP: Photo / William Ploewen

film projector with its familiar hum and buzz, the images were projected to the screen in the comparatively silent digital projectors developed jointly by Texas Instruments and Hughes-JVC, a CineComm partner.

According to *The Hollywood Reporter*, "The digital projection of *Phantom* [marks] the first time the moviegoing public [can] see a fully digital, full-length feature."

What all this technical mumbo-

jumbo ultimately means is that fans in two areas had the opportunity to see Episode I exactly as George Lucas intended—and got a glimpse of the new exhibition method that Lucas hopes to use nationally for Episode II's release.

R2-D2 Invades MIT

Students at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) awoke on the morning of May 17 to discover a familiar astromech droid looming over their Cambridge, Massachusetts, campus. To celebrate the arrival of *The Phantom Menace*, student pranksters had transformed MIT's "Great Dome" at the center of campus into a giant R2-D2. The culprits left campus officials a set of instructions, addressed to "Imperial Drones," for taking down the droid,

MEET THE MARFALUMP

» ILM Commercial Productions creates new CGI character for Pepsi Commercials

FOLLOWING ILM'S SUCCESS with digitally animated characters like Watto, Sebulba, and a gaggle of Gungans, Industrial Light & Magic Commercial Productions (ILMCP) collaborated with advertising agency BBDO-New York to create a new computer-generated character exclusively for Pepsi commercials. The character, called Marfalump, is the centerpiece of a massive tie-in campaign between *Star Wars: Episode I The Phantom Menace* and PepsiCo, owner not only of Pepsi-Cola but also Frito Lay snack food, and the former owner of food chains Pizza Hut, Taco Bell, and KFC, now part of a spin-off company, Tri-Con.

Pepsi's first commercial, titled "Landing," began airing in late May, introducing viewers to the four-armed, four-foot-tall Marfalump, an alien adopted by an Iowa family who builds himself a rocket to fly to the premiere of Episode I, resulting in a crash-landing right next to a tuxedo-clad Jake Lloyd. The next commercial, called "Play Acting," followed in June, and featured Marfalump (voiced by Billy West) delivering a virtual tour-de-force of funny *Star Wars* character impressions and Episode I dialogue—all to the bewilderment of a bitter blind date.

Pepsi-Cola senior vice-president Dawn Hudson said company executives were determined to "achieve something that's never been done before in advertising. We set the bar high because we wanted the digital quality of Marfalump to be equal to the fantastic characters created for Episode I. ILM has never created a character this technologically sophisticated for an ad until now."

The ILMCP commercials are just the tip of the iceberg for Pepsi's *Star Wars* onslaught. Beginning in May, every can of Pepsi, Diet Pepsi, Pepsi One, Mountain Dew, and Storm featured a different Episode I character—24 different cans in all, with new versions released every two weeks through September. In addition to the two dozen collector cans, Pepsi also random-

ly distributed a limited number of gold Yoda cans, redeemable for \$20 and a replacement can. *Star Wars* designs also graced Pepsi bottles, and PepsiCo's Frito Lay division featured special Episode I packaging and giveaways on its potato chip brands.

The Tri-Con plans were also vast. For the first time, Taco Bell, KFC, and Pizza Hut joined forces for a series of television commercials and sweepstakes entitled "Defeat the Dark Side." For the promotion, each restaurant was designated and decorated as a different *Star Wars* planet, with Taco Bell representing the desert planet of Tatooine, KFC standing in for Naboo, and cosmopolitan Pizza Hut the natural choice to portray Coruscant.

For many fans, the Tri-Con *Star Wars* transformation meant one thing: toys. Each restaurant sold different items from a line of 28 awesome toys created by Applause, as well as a series of 12 incredibly detailed character "cup toppers," and another series of six "bucket toppers" for KFC. The toys and cup toppers were all priced under \$3, making them more irresistible than the dark side itself. (Favorites of the Insider include the Planet Naboo that opens into a lightsaber duel between Jinn and Maul, as well as an Opee Sea Creature Chaser that always gets its bongo, both from KFC; the Hovering Watto and Levitating Queen Amidala's Royal Starship at Taco Bell; and the wizard R2-D2 cup/cup topper complete with legs.)

Other fans descended on the Tri-Con restaurants in a valiant attempt to "Defeat the Dark Side"—and win everything from a million bucks to an Episode I speeder, and even, yes, subscriptions to *Star Wars Insider*, not to mention simply collect the cool character pog-like game pieces. The campaign also featured original television commercials that featured KFC Icon Colonel Sanders wielding a lightsaber and teaming up with Taco Bell's ubiquitous Chihuahua and a Leia-like Pizza Hut delivery woman on a mission to save the planet of Naboo. ☺



Marfalump with his fave beverage.

and issued a campuswide email pledging to "restore humor to the galaxy." Mission: accomplished.

Real-Life Star Wars Racer Hits the Track

Giving cinematic Podracer pilots Sebulba and Gargano a run for their money, three-time Winston Cup champion Jeff Gordon brought the Force to the world of motorsports on the Memorial Day weekend, when he got behind the wheel of a Pepsi Star Wars race car at the Busch Garden National Carquest Auto Parts 300, May 29 at Lowe's Motor Speedway in Charlotte, North Carolina.

The Gordon-Everham Motorsports #24 Pepsi Chevrolet features a hood emblazoned with lightsaber-wielding Jedi and a bold blue paint scheme depicting battles in the stars. "I was only six-years old when the first *Star Wars* movie came out, and I loved every minute of it," Gordon said. "Pepsi brought us the idea of creating a *Star Wars* car and we jumped at the opportunity!"

Unfortunately, the Force was not with Gordon during the race—he placed 33rd after being rear-ended. But for fans there's a silver lining: Action Performance will market and distribute exclusive die-cast collectibles of the *Star Wars* car, and no less than five Hasbro Winner's Circle Jeff Gordon die-cast vehicles with the *Star Wars* paint scheme will race into stores this fall. Now that's Podracing! ☺

Weird Al Strikes Back

"Weird Al" Yankovic, whose parodic prowess reached its height with the 1985 release of "Yoda," his spoof of the Kinks' classic song "Lola," has returned with an all new Episode I spoof song. Yankovic's effort, included on his album *Running with Scissors*, scheduled for release on

June 29, is a song called "The Saga Begins," which the *Los Angeles Times* described as "summarizing and spoofing" the plot of Episode I, and sung, improbably, to the tune of Don McLean's classic song, "American Pie." Talk about weird!



Decipher's "Young Jedi" Mind Trick

Star Wars Collectible Card Game (CCG) enthusiasts were treated to a customizable prequel of sorts when Decipher unveiled its new Young Jedi CCG at the *Star Wars* Celebration in Denver. With the first release of the game, called "The Menace of Darth Maul," menacing players since May, Decipher is set to unleash the game's next two phases later this summer.

The new game, covering the characters, ships, weapons, and locations of *The Phantom Menace*, allows fans of collecting and competitive game play to carry character battles across all the plan-



etary systems seen in Episode I, and is designed to take just 15 minutes to learn and 15 minutes to play. Each 140-card set is sold in 11 Booster packs and 60-card starter sets, with each booster pack containing one rare card—the rarest of which are the special foil cards.

Decipher has scheduled the second wave of Young Jedi, entitled "The Jedi Council," for release in early July, with "Battle of Naboo" slated to follow in late August. ☺

STAR SIGHTINGS

Ready for a singing Obi-Wan? No, it's not some misguided new toy—instead, **EWAN MCGREGOR** (Obi-Wan Kenobi) will star—and sing—with Nicole Kidman in the 20th Century Fox 1899-set musical *Moulin Rouge* for director Baz Luhrmann (*Romeo + Juliet*). ... McGregor will also star as legendary writer James Joyce in the independent film *Nora*, as a disgraced British financier in the HBO/Cinemax film *Rogue Trader*, and with Ashley Judd in the upcoming *Eye of the Beholder*. ...

NATALIE PORTMAN (Queen Amidala) will find out *Where the Heart Is* when she stars with Ashley Judd in a feature film based on the best-selling novel by Billie Letts. ... **JAKE LLOYD** (Anakin Skywalker) will race hydroplanes in his next movie, *Madison* (which is based on a true story—not on Jake's little sister and Episode I costar **MADISON LLOYD**). ... Jedi Master **SAMUEL L. JACKSON** (Mace Windu) stars in *The Red Violin* and *The Caveman's Valentine*. ...

WARWICK DAVIS (Wicket, Wald, and Weazel) announced at the *Star Wars* Celebration that he will soon be starring with John Larroquette in the 10-hour NBC miniseries *Tenth Kingdom*, as well as with Tucker's Martin Landau in *The Adventures of Pinocchio II*. ... Davis also announced at the Celebration that he will reprise his title role in the fifth installment of his popular *Leprechaun* series of

horror-comedies, *Leprechaun N tha Hood*, which could pair Davis with fallen rap idol Ice-T. ...

HUGH QUARSHIE (Captain Panaka) revealed at the *Star Wars* Celebration that his next film is *The Arabian Knights*. ... **RAY PARK** (Darth Maul) lends his talents to Tim Burton's *Sleepy Hollow*, which also features **IAN MCDIARMID** (Palpatine). ... **GREG PROOPS** (Fode), sans computer-generated second head, hosts the new Comedy Central game show *VS*. ...

Continuing the strong *Star Wars*-Muppet crossover tradition, Jedi Master **LIAM NEESON** (Qui-Gon Jinn) took a walk down *Sesame Street*, appearing with Ernie and the Count in an episode of the classic PBS show in May. ... **BILLY DEE WILLIAMS** (Lando Calrissian) appeared on a May episode of TV's *Promised Land*. ... Ewan McGregor's uncle, **DENIS LAWSON** (Wedge Antilles), plays Captain Foster in the British series of *Horatio Hornblower* telefilms, airing in the U.S. on the A&E cable network. ...

JOHN WILLIAMS (composer of all four *Star Wars* scores) is writing the music for director Alan Parker's *Angela's Ashes*. ... *Return of the Jedi* visual effects supervisor **KEM RALSTON** will direct *Jumanji 2*, filling the shoes of *Jedi*'s visual effects art director **JOE JOHNSTON**, who directed the original *Jumanji*. ☺

STAR WARS vector PRIME

CHAPTER 4 SEEDS PLANTED by R.A. Salvatore



THIS NOVEMBER, DEL REY BOOKS WILL PUBLISH VECTOR PRIME, the first new novel chronicling the adventures of the classic *Star Wars* trilogy characters since the *Star Wars* fiction license shifted from Bantam back to Del Rey. *Vector Prime* is also the first title in a new story arc called "The New Jedi Order."

To write this first, important novel in the series, Lucas Publishing turned to R. A. Salvatore, the acclaimed author of *The Crystal Shard* and more than a dozen other novels, including four which placed on the *New York Times* best-sellers list. The Massachusetts native, who lives there with his wife Diane and their three children, is also the author of such fantasy series as *The Spearwielder's Tales*, *The Crimson Shadow*, *The Dark Elf*, and *The Demon Awakens*, including the new *The Demon Apostle*.

In *Vector Prime*, which takes place about 25 years after the Battle of Yavin depicted in *A New Hope*, Leia Organa Solo is on a diplomatic mission with her daughter Jaina and Mara Jade to mediate a dispute between the systems of Osarian and Rhommamool, where the planet's leader, the evil and mysterious Nom Anor, is stirring up near-religious anti-Jedi (and anti-droid) fervor among his exploited people.

In this fourth chapter, as Luke, Han, and Chewbacca struggle on Coruscant to repair, yet again, the *Millennium Falcon*, Leia, Mara, and a frightened C-3PO land the *Jedi Sabre* on Rhommamool for their first encounter with the menacing Nom Anor—and make some unsettling discoveries about this new adversary.

"THE JADE SABRE HAS MADE ORBIT," Shok Tinoktin informed Nom Anor that night. "Leia Organa Solo is aboard her, along with her daughter and Mara Jade Skywalker."

"And a Noghri," Nom Anor added. "Always at least one Noghri if Leia Solo is about."

"The Noghri are worthy adversaries," Tinoktin agreed. "But I fear the others more. So should you."

Nom Anor turned a glare upon the man, reminding him of who was the boss here, and who the mere attendant. And Shok Tinoktin did shrink back, the blood draining from his face. He had been around Nom Anor long enough to fear that glare as much as, perhaps even more than, he feared death itself.

"They are Jedi," he stammered, trying to clarify his warning, trying to make certain that Nom Anor did not note any lack of confidence in him. Speaking doubts about Nom Anor had proven a fatal flaw for several previous advisers.

"Leia is not true Jedi, or at least, she has not embraced her Jedi powers, from what I have been told," Nom Anor replied with a sly grin, one that allowed Shok to relax a bit. "Nor is her daughter a proven Jedi."

"But Mara Jade is counted among the strongest of the Jedi Knights," Shok Tinoktin pointed out.

"Mara Jade has her own problems to consider," Nom Anor reminded.

Shok Tinoktin didn't take comfort in that; in fact, the reminder of Mara's disease only heightened his trepidation about letting her see Nom Anor at this time.

"She should be long dead," he dared to say.

Nom Anor smiled again and scratched his head. He had been wearing his ogliith masquer for a long while and was literally itching to take the thing off. But he hadn't the time, of course, and in truth, he didn't want even the trusted stooge Tinoktin to see his true, self-disfigured face, with its strange eye, a reflection of Nom Anor's highest show of devotion on the day he was awarded the position of executor among the Yuuzhan Vong, and first advance scout for the Praetorite Vong invasion force.

He had taken the eye out with the sharpened end of a burning stick. Of course, he had filled that hole in his face with yet another marvelous organic innovation, a plaeryin bol, a creature that looked much like a normal Yuuzhan Vong eyeball, but its pupil was really a mouth, and one that could spit a venomous glob accurately across ten meters at the command of its host, by a simple twitch of Nom Anor's eyelid.

"I am impressed with Mara Jade's ability to resist the spores," he admitted.

"Everyone else you tested them on was dead or dying within a few weeks," Shok Tinoktin replied. "Most within a few days."

Nom Anor nodded. His coomb-spore formula had indeed proven wonderfully effective, breaking down the victim's molecular structure and causing horrible death in short order. If only he could find a way to make the not-so-subtle shift from simple poison to disease, where the spores could become self-propagating, spreading on their own from being to being and thus infecting large populations.

Nom Anor sighed and scratched his head yet again. The spores—coomb, brollup, tegnest, and a dozen other varieties—were but a hobby, one that he had been able to insert into his official duties in attempting to develop some method for easily killing the super-creatures, the Jedi Knights. Also, such alchemical work, if successful, could prove critical in Nom Anor's ascension to the rank of high prefect. But in those endeavors and aspirations, to date at least, it appeared as if he had failed, for Mara Jade Skywalker had somehow defeated the spores, or at least had held them at bay.

"Do you have the shlecho newt?" he asked.

Shok Tinoktin nodded and reached into his pocket, producing a small brown-orange lizard.

"Make certain that it gets near to Mara Jade's mouth," Nom Anor explained, and Shok Tinoktin, who had heard the explicit instructions several times already, nodded. The coomb spores Nom Anor had used in his lethal blend were the favored delicacy of the shlecho newt, and if there was any trace of them at all on Mara

Illustration: Cliff Nielsen from cover art to Vector Prime



How crippled might the New Republic become if Leia Organa Solo suddenly succumbed to the same disease Mara Jade Skywalker was fighting. How debilitated might Leia and Luke, Mara and the always dangerous Han Solo become if Jaina Solo fell ill and died?

Jade's breath, the little creature would surely detect it.

"I shall escort them in," Shok Tinoktin offered, and after a confirming nod from Nom Anor, the man turned on his heel and walked from the room.

Nom Anor rested back in his chair, considering the upcoming meeting and the potential gains he might find. He thought it quite humorous that Rhommamool's enemies on Osarian were so fearful of the meeting that they thought Leia's recognition of Nom Anor in such a manner would strengthen his prestige and, therefore, power. For, in truth, Nom Anor hardly cared for any such gains in prestige at this time. In fact, his thinking went to quite the opposite. He carried all the emotional weight and influence he needed to control the weak people of Rhommamool, or of any other planets on which he planned to stir up trouble, but beyond that immediate sphere of influence, Nom Anor preferred anonymity.

For now.

No, Nom Anor was looking forward to this meeting simply so that he could gauge the effect of his infection upon Mara Jade, and so that he might learn more of the Jedi in general, including Leia, a woman he knew would prove pivotal in the upcoming events, and Jaina, who might prove to be a weak link to get to Leia Solo, perhaps even to Luke Skywalker and Mara Jade. That was one of his missions here, to identify those most dangerous foes and to find some way to minimize their effectiveness. Occasions such as the Osarian-Rhommamool conflict, where Nom Anor could also further the effects of the internal squabbles among the humans and their allies, could break tukken nom canbin-tu, or "weaken the hinges of the enemy's fort," as went the common saying in his native tongue, were then all the better. There were other agents doing that very same thing, after all, though in Nom Anor's estimation, it wasn't even a critical component of the Yuuzhan Vong's overall plan. These humans and their pitiful allies would propagate their own problems

by their very nature, he knew. They had no sense of structure and order, not in terms of the regimen and hierarchical code to which his own people adhered, at least. He had witnessed disinformation campaigns waged against political enemies, even one that had basically accused Leia Organa Solo of treason. He had witnessed coup attempts on many, many worlds and had seen supposed authorities profiting many times from the activities of less-than-legitimate business contacts. These infidels did not understand the law, or the need for unbending adherence to it.

That would make it all the easier for the disciplined Praetorite Vong, he knew, and all the more justifiable.

Nom Anor noticed on one of his many security holocams then that Shok Tinoktin was returning, with Tamaktis Breetha, the former mayor of Redhaven and now a member of Nom Anor's independent senate, and Leia, Jaina, and Mara. He noted the movements of two others, as well: a golden droid—and he would have to remember to punish Shok Tinoktin for allowing a droid into his complex—and a ghostly gray creature seeming almost to float behind the others, hanging close to Leia, as if it was nothing more substantial than the woman's shadow. The expected Noghri bodyguard, Nom Anor knew. He nodded at the sight and made a mental note to keep careful watch on that one. In many ways, Nom Anor held much more respect for the Noghri, those deadly warriors, than for any humans, even Jedi.

Then he let his gaze shift back to Mara, studying her every movement, trying to discern some hint of instability, some hint that the infection was fighting on. He did see Shok Tinoktin's shlecho newt on the man's shoulder, eyeing Mara directly, its eyes wide, its tongue darting, and its head a brilliant shade of crimson, a clear sign of excitement.

So, he mused, the coomb spores, at least, continued their assault on the woman, and Nom Anor's respect for Mara heightened even more.

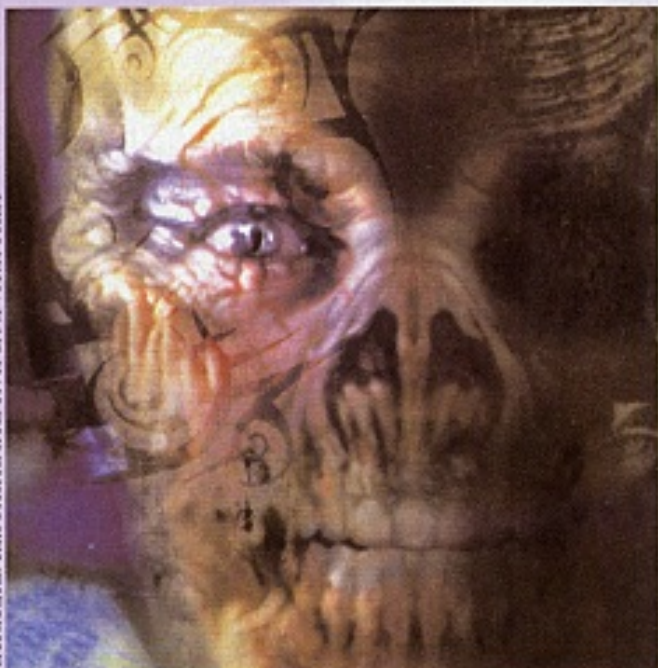
He went to his closet then and took out his great black cape, throwing it about his shoulders, pulling the hood up over his head, cowl low and concealing, then reaching in and lifting the black screen he used to completely cover his already-masked face. Though this was his usual public dress, Nom Anor chuckled as he completed the outfit. He knew the history of his guests and understood that the sight of him dressed like this might play interestingly upon them, particularly upon Leia, for it was hard to miss the likeness of Nom Anor to another foe Leia had once battled.

In a box on a shelf hidden deep in that closet, Nom Anor kept his remaining infectious agents, and it occurred to him, though only briefly, that he might use this opportunity to infect the other two, as well. How crippled might the New Republic become if Leia Organa Solo suddenly succumbed to the same disease Mara Jade Skywalker was fighting? How debilitated might Leia and Luke, Mara and the always dangerous Han Solo become if Jaina Solo fell ill and died?

Pleasant thoughts, no doubt, but Nom Anor couldn't take the chance of linking himself so obviously to the deadly infection. Along that same line of thinking, particularly given the sensory powers of the Jedi and the evasive nature of Noghri, Nom Anor realized that it would be a mistake to allow Leia and the others into these private quarters. He hustled to his door and pushed out into the hall, arriving just as Shok Tinoktin led the group around a bend in the corridor.

He saw the spark of recognition on Mara's face, and he knew as she turned quickly to Leia that she was informing the other woman of his identity. In the back, Tamaktis Breetha bowed and

Illustration: Cliff Nielsen from cover art to Vector Prime



"I bring greetings from the council of the New Republic," Leia said in formal greeting, and the fact that she spoke so quickly, and with her voice controlled and even, offered Nom Anor a bit of insight into the strength of this woman. She was one to respect.

held his position.

Nom Anor nodded to Shok Tinoktin, and the man moved out of the way, allowing Leia a clear path to Nom Anor.

She sucked in her breath; Nom Anor saw the recognition, the surprise, even horror, upon her face. He looked like Darth Vader!

"I bring greetings from the council of the New Republic," Leia said in formal greeting, and the fact that she spoke so quickly, and with her voice controlled and even, offered Nom Anor a bit of insight into the strength of this woman. She was one to respect.

"You bring interference where it is not wanted," he countered. Tamaktis Breetha gasped, and even Shok Tinoktin was a bit taken aback at Nom Anor's sudden surliness and brusque attitude.

"We have come as arranged," Leia said. "An agreement between you and Borsk Fey'lya, I believe."

"I agreed that an emissary could come," Nom Anor admitted. "To what end, I do not know. What can you contribute, Leia Organa Solo, to the dispute between Rhommamool and Osarian? What flame of hope can you light within the Rhommamoolians that their desperate cry for independence shall not be ignored by the New Republic, who speak of freedom as the greatest of all virtues?"

"Perhaps we should retire to more private chambers," Leia suggested. Tamaktis Breetha seemed about to agree, but a look from Nom Anor cured him of that suicidal urge.

"What have you to hide?" Nom Anor mocked her.

"More comfortable quarters, then," the woman persisted.

"Will a chair make you more comfortable?" Nom Anor asked.

"Physically, perhaps, but will it make you more comfortable with the truth?"

Leia looked at him incredulously.

"For that is all that I have to offer you," Nom Anor rolled on. "The truth that Osarian has no claim over the people of Rhommamool. The truth of the frailties and failings of your New Republic. The truth of the false heroes, the Jedi Knights."

"Your truth," Mara interjected, and Leia glanced back at her.

Glad of the confirmation that his little tirade was wearing thin on them, Nom Anor didn't even try to hide his smile, though it was hardly visible through the black face screen.

"There is only one truth," he said calmly. "It is when one does not like to hear it that one concocts other, more palatable versions."

"If I may, Princess Leia," c-3po began, moving forward. "There is ample history of the Jedi Knights to show them as true—"

"Silence!" Nom Anor growled at the droid, and the powerful being trembled visibly, as if he was about to explode into murderous action against poor c-3po, who was also trembling, though hardly in a threatening manner.

"Are we to discuss the situation between Osarian and Rhommamool?" Leia asked, her tone diplomatic and soothing. She moved as she spoke to gently push c-3po back, and nodded to Jaina to collect the droid and to keep him quiet.

"I thought we were doing just that," Nom Anor said, under complete control once more, as Leia turned back to him.

"This is not a meeting," Leia countered. "It is a lecture in a hallway."

"And even that is more than Borsk Fey'lya deserves," Nom Anor was quick to answer. "Would you not agree, former Councilor Solo?"

"This is not about Borsk Fey'lya," Leia retorted, keeping her calm, though Nom Anor saw the fringes at the edge of that calm beginning to unravel. "This is about the fate of two worlds."

"Who need nothing from the hypocritical New Republic," Nom Anor added. "The New Republic that speaks of peace and prosperity, when it means peace in terms of the lower classes having no power to gain wealth or power, and prosperity only for elite friends of the New Republic."

Leia shook her head and sputtered a few undecipherable words.

"Order your battle cruiser to destroy the Osarians' ability to attack Rhommamool," Nom Anor said in all seriousness. "Shoot down their starfighters and cripple their missile pads, and forbid them to rebuild such offensive weapons."

Leia stared at him hard, and the depth of her expression, he knew, carried more than the frustration of the immediate circumstances, carried in it the remembered weight of long-ago enemies.

"And when they leave us alone, the conflict will be at its end," Nom Anor went on. "Peace will prevail. And so will prosperity." He paused and brought a hand up to his black-masked face and struck a pensive pose. "Ah, yes, then prosperity will prevail, but it will be prosperity for Rhommamool and not Osarian, not the favored elite of the New Republic."

"You can't believe what you're saying," Leia returned dryly.

"Can't I?" Nom Anor asked, his voice dripping sarcasm. "A plausible read of the situation. Go out yourself among the streets of Redhaven and ask."

"If you cared for the people of Rhommamool, you'd sit down and negotiate away this budding war," Leia said bluntly.

"I thought that was what we just did," Nom Anor said.

Leia's expression again turned incredulous.

"I told you how to stop it," Nom Anor went on. "A simple call to the commander of your intervening terror weapon..."

Leia looked back at Mara and Jaina and shook her head.

"Not what you expected?" came Nom Anor's sarcastic, taunting reply. "But more than you, or the New Republic, deserved. I think our positions are clear, and so I bid you turn about, back to your silly little flying box, and away from Rhommamool. I am afraid that I have lost patience with your foolishness."

Leia stared at him long and hard, then turned on her heel and

stormed away, sweeping up Jaina and Mara in her wake. Bolpuhr, too, turned about, but not until he had given a long and threatening stare at Nom Anor, who merely smiled widely in reply. c-3po, too, turned to leave, but he lingered there a moment, wilting under Nom Anor's glare, perhaps the coldest stare he had ever felt.

"Excuse me, sir, but may I inquire if there is a problem?" the droid gingerly asked.

"One I could easily rectify," Nom Anor answered ominously, coming forward a step, his stance threatening.

"Have I somehow offended you?" the droid politely asked, although he was quaking with fear.

"Your mere existence offends me!" Nom Anor growled, and c-3po, having heard enough—too much, actually—wheeled about and hustled away, calling for Princess Leia.

"I did not expect such an encounter," Tamaktis Breetha dared to say, moving to stand beside Nom Anor.

"Nor did I," Nom Anor replied. "I had thought the meeting would be boring, and hardly that much fun." He looked at his former mayor and recognized the doubts on the man's face.

"Speak your mind," Nom Anor bade him. "Your questions will only strengthen me."

"Rhomamool will indeed need the help of the New Republic," Tamaktis Breetha said after a long pause.

Nom Anor chuckled. The man didn't understand. This wasn't about Rhomamool—Nom Anor would hardly care if he left the place and then later learned that Osarian had completely obliterated it. Of course, he would never go on record making such a statement.

"Our cause is bigger than the civil war between a pair of planets," he told Tamaktis. "It is about the basic freedoms of citizens of the New Republic and basic fairness to the exploited masses everywhere. When that truth comes out, then Rhomamool will find all the allies it needs to crush the thief-lords of Osarian."

The former mayor squared his shoulders as Nom Anor spoke, taking pride in the cause—the greater, if impractical, cause. "I will see that our guests depart promptly," he said, dipping a bow and, after Nom Anor motioned for him to proceed, starting away.

Nom Anor went to Shok Tinoktin and gently patted the head of the still-excited shlecho newt.

"The scent of the coomb spore was strong on her breath," Shok Tinoktin remarked.

"And she wasn't as strong," Nom Anor added. "I could see it in the way she walked and held herself." Supremely pleased with himself, the executor headed for his private quarters, Shok Tinoktin moving to follow.

"Make sure that their course away leads them past the square," Nom Anor said to him on sudden insight. "I want them to witness the devotion."

Shok Tinoktin bowed and turned away.

Nom Anor went into his room. He started for the two villips he had concealed in his closet, but changed his mind and went to his skylight instead, staring up at the stars that were just beginning to peek out as the sun disappeared. Had they made contact? he wondered. Had the yammosk set up the controlling base?

"HE LOOKED LIKE DARTH—" Jaina started to say.

"Don't even talk about it," Leia cut her off, her tone leaving no room for debate. "Try to keep up, Threepio," she said, more sharply than she had intended, when the droid came bounding around a rounded corner in full flight, nearly crashing into one of the metal support girders that lined the hallway like a giant rib cage. "And try not to get lost."

"Oh, never that, Princess Leia," c-3po said, as sincere as he

had ever been, and he glued himself to Leia's side.

They continued along the winding maze of corridors, up stairwells and through heavy doors, and it occurred to all of them how defensible this place truly was, a bunker more than a statehouse. Also, given the number of stairs they climbed, and where they eventually came out, they realized that Nom Anor's private chambers were quite far below ground, something that had been lost on them in their trip down, a journey that had followed a more meandering route, along corridors they now understood to be gently, almost imperceptibly, sloping.

They arrived at the *Jade Sobre* without incident, and the guards standing before the shuttle's hatch briskly stepped aside.

"I wish that it could have gone better," Tamaktis Breetha remarked to Leia after Jaina, Mara, and c-3po went aboard to begin departure preparations.

"Perhaps you should tell that to Nom Anor," Leia replied, and the gentle-eyed old man bowed.

"You must understand that Osarian has been ruling us as a virtual slave colony for decades," Tamaktis began.

"I know the history, and the current standing," Leia replied. "Your intractable leader does not help the situation."

Tamaktis, obviously unconvinced, didn't respond.

Leia shook her head and moved into the ship, Bolpuhr gliding in behind her, the Noghri never taking his wary gaze from Tamaktis or the two sentries.

"We've got a course change," Mara informed Leia as soon as she joined the others on the bridge, taking her customary seat behind Jaina.

"They want us to fly low across the city, then vector out from the west," Jaina explained.

"A trap?" the wary Leia asked.

"I don't see the point," Mara said. "They could have taken out the shuttle while we were with Nom Anor, and could have easily captured us inside the complex."

"Unless they're trying to make it look like an accident," Jaina put in.

Leia nodded, reflecting her similar concerns.

"They haven't got a thing that will take us out of the air once we're up and fully powered," Mara said firmly.

"Nothing that we know about," Leia added, and that truth gave Mara pause.

"We could signal the Mediator for an escort," Jaina offered.

Leia shook her head. "Just follow their course," she offered. "But be ready to blast out of here at the slightest sign of trouble."

They heard Bolpuhr give a low hiss in the hallway, apparently not pleased with that choice.

"Maybe your Noghri noticed Nom Anor's resemblance to Darth Vader, as well," Mara said with a tension-breaking grin.

But Leia shuddered visibly at the awful thought.

The *Jade Sobre* lifted off and skimmed across the city, barely above the rooftops, as the departure controller ordered. A few moments later, Leia understood the design of this course change, as the great square of Redhaven came into view, where a celebration was in full swing, great bonfires burning.

"What is that?" Jaina asked, pointing down at the huge pit, and Mara, equally curious, brought the *Jade Sobre* in for a low flyby.

c-3po wailed and the three women crinkled their faces when the truth of that pit became apparent, when they saw the battered, pitiful droids, some still moving or sparking, and every motion invariably drawing a new volley of stones from the crazed crowd that ringed the pit.

"Barbaric!" c-3po cried. "The inhumanity!"

"Get us out of here," a disgusted Leia instructed, but Mara was already spinning the *Jade Sobre* up on end and punching full throttle, the roar of the twin engines making many of the fanatics in the square dive for cover. A squawk of protest came over the comm, but Mara just clicked it off.

"Well," she said as they soared far, far away, "I warned you about Nom Anor. Still think I was exaggerating?"

"He is about as infuriating as any being I've ever met," Leia agreed.

"And once again, my sensitivity to the Force revealed nothing about him," Mara added. "Nothing. I even tried to silently call to him, just to get a reaction, but he didn't respond at all—I don't even know that he heard it—and so completely did he ignore me that there was little I could learn about him."

"Same with me," Jaina admitted. "It's like he was totally devoid of the Force. I didn't like the feel of that other one, Shok Tinoktin, either."

Mara nodded. "But I don't have the feeling that there was any hint of a bluff in Nom Anor's rebuttal," she said. "He brought us here for no better reason than to snub us, and even if Gaarian puts the pressure on, I doubt that one will ever negotiate."

Leia got up and rubbed her eyes, shook her head in utter frustration, and gave a helpless sigh. "I admire you," she said to Mara. "Truly. You met him once and agreed to do so again. You're a braver person than I."

LUKE AND JACEN FOUND THE MILLENNIUM FALCON right where they left it, Docking Bay 2722, and judging from the sounds coming from the bay, the clank of metal wrenches, the hum of turbo drivers, and the stream of muttered curses, they figured that Han and Chewie were still trying to figure out how to fix the thing.

On the way to Coruscant, Han had given the controls over to Anakin, who was more than a bit jealous that Mara often let Jaina fly the *Jade Sobre*, and the fifteen-year-old, predictably, pulled a few hotdogging maneuvers on the way down. But while the *Millennium Falcon* was surprisingly agile for a ship that looked more like an old garbage scow than a starfighter, she was also much, much more powerful. The *Falcon* had the ability to pull the turns Anakin put her through—though with his inertial compensator dialed down only 2 percent, everyone on board had nearly passed out from the g's—but the boy had apparently throttled up a bit too hard coming out of more than one. By the time Han had managed to take back the controls for the last remnant of the flight to dock, the *Falcon* was listing badly, with one engine and several repulsorlifts firing intermittently and unpredictably. Even now, secured in the bay, one of those repulsors popped off now and again, jolting the ship's edge up a few degrees, to bounce back down as the repulsor sputtered back out.

Luke and Jacen exchanged a smile as the *Falcon* went up yet again, higher this time, nearly onto its side, then dropped fast to horizontal, slamming down against the floor.

"Weeow!" came the screech of R2-D2.

"Chewie!" Han cried, from somewhere above the open lower landing ramp, followed by a thud, a swear or two, and a wrench bouncing down the ramp to clang out into the docking bay.

Han staggered down behind, covered in grease and sweat, muttering every step of the way. He bent to retrieve the wrench, but

stopped and glanced up at his returning son and brother-in-law.

"Teenagers," he muttered.

"I thought you'd have it fixed by now," Luke replied.

"All but that number-seven repulsor," Han explained. "Something crossed and shorted in one of the kid's rocker-rolls. Keeps firing off and on even if we power her down. Artoo got a bit of a shock when he plugged into the nav computer."

Luke smiled widely. Ever since he had met Han and set eyes on the *Falcon*, he considered the two, pilot and ship, to be almost spiritually linked. Both were a patchwork of seemingly unrelated skills, and both were far more formidable than they appeared. And both, Luke thought now, always seemed to be breaking down and defying logic in the repair mode.

"Try it now!" came Anakin's voice from within, answered by a Wookiee wail.

The *Falcon* hummed to life, repulsorlifts firing in testing sequence: one-ten, two-nine, three-eight, four . . . seven.

And seven fired beautifully.

"Kid's got talent," Han remarked, but even as he said it, some-

thing inside the *Falcon* exploded and thick smoke poured down the landing ramp, accompanied by another R2-D2 "Weeow!"

Chewie wailed again.

"You pushed it too fast!" Anakin yelled at the Wookiee, and Chewie's wail became a

growl, and a moment later, Anakin came running down the ramp, waving the smoke from his face, as filthy as if he had just dived face-first into a Tinuvian tar pit.

He skidded to a stop before his glowering father.

"He pushed it too fast," Anakin sheepishly tried to explain.

"You pushed it too fast," Han countered, anger rising.

"You said I—"

"I said you could fly it," Han interrupted, poking his finger at the boy. "I didn't say you could try to outdo your sister, because you can't, you know. And you can't turn the *Falcon* the way you turn a landspeeder!"

"But—" Anakin paused and looked to his uncle and brother for support, but while the two weren't smiling any longer, neither did they have anything to offer against Han's assessment.

With a sigh that sounded more like a snarl, Anakin waved his hands in frustration and stormed back up the landing ramp.

"Teenagers!" Han cried.

Now Luke did smile again, for he could envision a young Han Solo in exactly the same situation, hearing the exasperated cry of "Teenagers!" from every adult around him. There were many differences between Anakin and Han, with the son seeming far more introspective. But concerning many matters, like flying the *Falcon*, apparently, Anakin Solo had his father's unbridled spirit. In cases like this, it almost scared Luke how much Anakin was like Han, in appearance and in temperament.

CHIEWIE GREETED THE RETURNING ANAKIN with a disapproving growl.

"We'll fix it!" the boy replied with a sigh. "It's just a stupid ship."

Even before those last words had left his mouth, Anakin found himself up in the air, his head uncomfortably close to the myriad of wires in the *Falcon*'s main power grid. The powerful Wookiee

"Kid's got talent," Han remarked, but even as he said it, something inside the Falcon exploded and thick smoke poured down the landing ramp, accompanied by another R2-D2 "Weeow!"

IT BEGAN IN *RUNNING WITH THE DEMON*—
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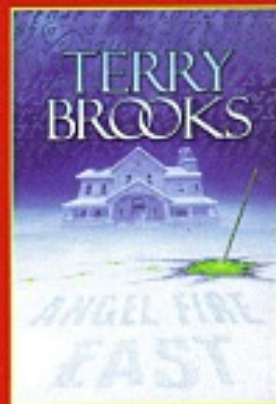
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PREQUEL UPDATE

WITH RICK MCCALLUM

» **For this Prequel Update,** the *Insider* caught up with prequel producer Rick McCallum at the Hyatt Regency hotel when he was in New York City for the Episode I press junket—just one week after work was completed on *The Phantom Menace*, and less than two weeks before it would debut in theaters.

Rick, now that the movie is finally finished, admit it: were there points along the way when you had doubts you would be able to finish Episode I on time?

Yes—I'd say the last four-and-a-half years! We only finished last week, and it was exactly, to the day, four-and-a-half years. There was a lot of sweat. It's so relentless, and even when we started shooting, we had no idea how we were going to accomplish half the things we wanted to do. So that was pretty terrifying. You know, I don't think there's any other business in the world where you can start something and spend so much money on resources and time and talent, and you still don't know how you're going to do it! It would be like building this hotel and not knowing if you're going to be able to create steel to actually hold the top 50 floors. It's a weird experience.

We had up to 1,800 people at one time working on the movie. We shot in four different countries. We built everything. Everything had to be designed. Everything had to be functional. Luckily we've got a guy who is both the writer and the director, so he's got a very clear idea and he's able to express that very clearly. But it's intense.

Were there any sequences, in particular, that you were concerned about making work?

Primarily the Podrace and the end battle, and even to a large degree how we were going to be able to create characters like Watto—how he can fly, how he can interact seamlessly with a live actor. Those were the real tough things that we didn't know whether or not we were really going to be able to crack. But you know, faith is a wonderful thing.

How different would this film turn out if

you were to start it now, with all those tools ILM recently developed at your immediate disposal?

Totally different! At this point, every 18 months you can buy a piece of hardware that is twice as fast at half the cost. So a lot of things we did two years ago when we finished shooting the movie, we could do effortlessly now. Plus, there would be all the software we still haven't been able to develop. The hardware's there, but we just haven't had the opportunity to develop the software to match the speed of the hardware.

"WE HAD UP TO 1,800 PEOPLE at one time working on the movie. We shot in four different countries. We built everything. Everything had to be designed. Everything had to be functional."

What kind of impact will that have on Episode II?

Huge. It will drive the cost down and allow us to create something 30, 40 percent more intense in terms of sheer scale and size. That's a beautiful thing if you're a producer!

Do you think the techniques developed for Episode I will have an effect on filmmaking in general?

Well, it's interesting—everything that everybody else has developed, we take on board, and everything that we develop goes onto the next person. So the stakes are always rising. It started with *The Abyss* and *T2*, then it went onto *Jurassic Park*, *Men in Black*, and *A Bug's Life*, *Toy Story*, all those films. Everything that everybody learns from each other is folded back into the next person who wants to raise the level a little bit higher.

The great thing is that for the first time, all this stuff is converging to a point where a shot that cost \$100,000 two years ago costs \$20,000

now. We're at a point now where it doesn't matter whether you're doing a small independent film for half a million dollars, or even a \$15,000 small internet film—or a \$100 million dollar picture. This stuff is accessible to anyone. It's mind-boggling. I saw a parody trailer that was done on the Web by a 12-year-old kid that has as much blue screen work as we do.

Do you have the technology now to accomplish what George is planning for Episodes II and III?

Not for III. We were actually planning to do II and III back-to-back. But once George started to really talk about what he wanted in II, it was better to not try and compress them, to let them take their time—because, as I said, the

stuff that can happen in two years is just extraordinary.

What actors or characters will definitely be returning for Episode II?

We'll definitely see Natalie, definitely Ewan, and definitely Ian McDiarmid. We'll definitely see Anakin, but in another form since it's about 10, 12 years later.

Can you tell us anything yet about how these characters will develop?

Well, I think the Queen's got a long journey—I mean, she's just at the beginning. She's only 14 when she takes over the planet, so the invasion is the first real obstacle in her life, and she gets through it. I think what you're going to see coming from her—because obviously we know something happens—she's going to marry Anakin and they're going to have their two kids.

But the real thing is what happens to Anakin. How does he get there? Why does he do the things he does? Why does he lie and



Will Episode II bring us a villain as fearsome as Darth Maul [played by Ray Park]? Only time will tell.



Ewan McGregor will reprise his role as Obi-Wan Kenobi in Episode II.

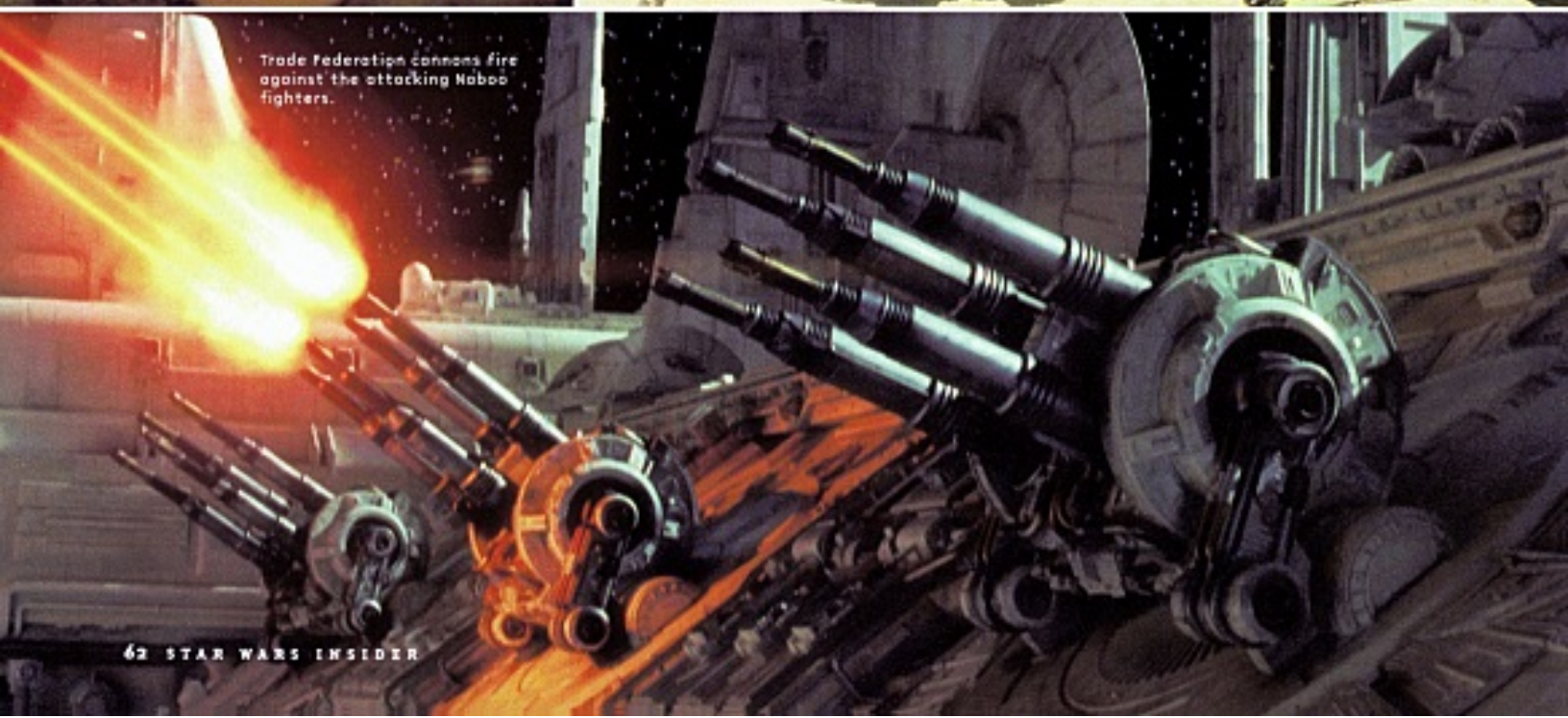


With the hyper-kinetic duel between Darth Maul, Qui-Gon Jinn [played by Liam Neeson] and Obi-Wan Kenobi [played by Ewan McGregor] *Star Wars: Episode I The Phantom Menace* reinvented the lightsaber battle.

One of the most challenging segments to create for *Star Wars* Episode I: *The Phantom Menace* was the Podrace.



We'll see an older Anakin Skywalker in Episode II.



Trade Federation cannons fire against the attacking Naboo fighters.

"GEORGE IS ABOUT a quarter of the way through the script [for Episode II]. He'll have the script done by September... Then in June of 2000, we start shooting. We release it in 2002."

cheat and hurt people? What are the consequences of that? If you don't have any compassion for somebody, is it because you're selfish? Is it because you think you're better than somebody? I think, thematically, that's what we're going to go through in the next two. Because Anakin is a perfect kid as we meet him now. He's innocent. He's got a talent. We don't know what it is yet.

If you have children, like I do, you want them to be able to achieve their dreams, and yet, some make it, some don't. Why don't they? Is it their character? Is it because of what's inside me? And what are the real consequences to a family when somebody you love messes up bad? Those are the things that are going to go on. And they're simple enough that I think almost every kid can get into that very easily, because of all the things that they have to wonder about—how am I going to leave? Am I going to be able to be the person I want to be? That is the emotional resonance of *Star Wars*.

It seems the nature of the story is going to grow darker over the next couple of films, with Anakin becoming Darth Vader. Does that pose any extra challenge?

Not really, because I think there is so much bad stuff going on in this country, and these are things that I don't think any young kid really had to deal with up until the last five or 10 years. These issues that are going to be brought up—probably 10 years ago they wouldn't have been real major issues for a kid.

I think the big thing in *Star Wars* was when Luke had the argument with his uncle, and he walks out and sees the two setting suns of Tatooine. You can see in that shot all the anxiety of what it's like to leave home, and all the yearning you have also. But I think it's a different world for kids now. It's no longer black and white—it's grey. And we're really going to get into the greyness of it for them.

How far into Episode II are you?

George is about a quarter of the way through the script. He'll have the script done by September. We know which locations we need to look for, so that's what the production designer, Gavin Bocquet, and I will be doing this summer. The art department will start to design all the vehicles and characters. Then in June of

2000, we start shooting. We release it in 2002, then immediately afterward in 2003 we start on Episode III for a 2005 release. If we're still alive!

We know you're moving the main stages from London to Sydney for Episode II. Will the production also be returning to Tunisia and Italy?

Australia, Tunisia, and Italy—and possibly Portugal and Spain.

With all the computer generated shots, why not make the whole movie on a digital backlot?

Because there's still a foreground reality that is very nice. There is certain sunlight, and sweat in the costumes, and characters and extras that you actually need to get the feeling of. We have our moves down pretty well now, and it's still easier going to Italy than having to design Caserta Palace, for example, that wonderful palace that the Queen is in at the beginning of the film. When it starts to be even cheaper to create it digitally in a virtual backlot, then we'll start to question what things are worth it.

Hopefully, one day it will be totally photo-realistic. It's not now. We're struggling to make it as realistic as possible. If you thought all of the Queen's palace was real, then I would feel happy. But there's only one central corridor: the opening shot, and walking down the stairs—that's the only reason we went to Italy, for those shots. The rest is all CG.

What was the budget for Episode I?

The budget was \$120 million, and we came in at \$115 million.

We know George was tinkering with Episode I up until the last minute. What was the last effects shot done?

It was a shot of the inside view of the electrical corridor. It's a shot where Darth Maul's lightsaber hits the force field, so you understand that you can't get through that force field.

You were also back in London only three weeks ago to shoot some extra footage. What scene did you add as recently as five weeks before the release, and why?

Do you remember when, toward the end of the movie, Senator Palpatine arrives with Yoda and

that whole delegation, and then the Neimoidians are sent back up into the ship to go back to Coruscant? There's a moment when Palpatine comes down and he thanks Obi-Wan. And then he takes a look at Anakin and he says that one quick line, "We'll be watching your career with great interest."

We shot the movie and then we just thought, Anakin is in Palpatine's quarters and he sees him, but he doesn't actually connect with him on an important level. So it's like a little warning of something that's going to happen in the future. We just thought, "Hey, let's shoot it!" It was a very simple little moment—three additional shots. We did it against blue screen, and we used the digital matte painting that we already had, and just matted it in. That's how easy that stuff is now.

That's the way we structure our movies. If you were doing a traditional movie, you'd have to rebuild the set, rebuild that platform, costumes would have been rented, since they would have been returned. But because we design everything, and we take long leases, we keep our sets up for about 18 months after we finish shooting, so George can go edit, rewrite, and reshoot all the way through. If we weren't tied to the analog process of actually making prints that have to be delivered all over the country, we'd probably still be shooting today!

A lot of fans are asking when the classic *Star Wars* trilogy will be released on DVD.

I'm not sure what the date is, because George is working on some really interesting ideas. He wants to show the process of how creatively you come to grips with the compromises you make when you make a movie—what it's like to write something, try and build it, and the compromises you make because of money and schedule and technology, and then the final product. So you're going to be able to see that on that DVD—just like we hope on the *Phantom* one. I want to do a silent version of the film, then I want to do a blue screen version of the film. We're really struggling with what is going to be the most interesting thing for people, because the great idea of the DVD format is you've got so much opportunity to express yourself and show the process for those people who want it. It's a fantastic format.

Rick, working on Episode I, were you like Obi-Wan to George's Qui-Gon?

No, I was Darth Maul to Yoda. ☹

—reporting by Scott Chernoff and Kevin Fitzpatrick



A costumed fan turns to the dark side during an encounter with Jabba the Hutt. This sculpted photo background was created by Greg Aronowitz and legends in Three Dimensions for the Star Wars Insider booth at the Star Wars Celebration.

STAR WARS CELEBRATION

THOUSANDS OF FANS PARTY LIKE IT'S 1999 AT THE
STAR WARS CELEBRATION IN DENVER

by Kevin Fitzpatrick



SPLISH SPLASH, THE STAR WARS CELEBRATION WAS A SMASH. Fans from all corners of the globe descended on Denver, Colorado, from April 30-May 2, 1999, for the grand three-day event, hailed on the scene as a "Star Wars Woodstock." For those 30,000 in attendance, the Celebration was like a birthday party you'd anticipated for over 10 years.

Lucasfilm made available seven actors and eight technical artists from Episode I to attend the convention. Props and costumes were shipped out and put on display, some for the first time. Dozens of Star Wars licensees unveiled their *Phantom Menace* wares. Two massive tents were erected to hold audiences of 1,500 apiece.

"There are so many people walking around with Darth Vader shirts," an enthusiastic Jake Lloyd told a hushed crowd. "And before they can recognize me, I'll go, 'Oh, Darth Vader is the best!'"

Young Lloyd was one of the most popular stars there—but he wasn't alone. Anthony Daniels, Ray Park, Warwick Davis and Hugh Quarshie flew in from London, while Sweden's Pernilla August came from Stockholm and Ahmed Best arrived from Brooklyn.

All the excitement took place at the Wings Over the Rockies Air and Space Museum, located at the old Lowry Air Force base. In a hangar filled with vintage warplanes, thousands of fans were treated to exhibits about Episode I and the Star Wars saga.

At first, it appeared as though the weather was controlled by the dark side, because for the first day and a half, the scene was straight out of Dagobah. A record two inches of rain fell on Friday. But in the end, the weekend wrapped in glorious sunshine, just like the ending of *The Phantom Menace* on Naboo.

In the hangar, sandwiched between retired F-102A and F-104C fighters, a full-size X-wing fighter joined the fleet. Organizers even raised a banner reading "X-wing" above it, just like the ones the Air Force had for its planes. The X-wing—nearby another fan mecca, Anakin's Podracer—was the natural favorite to serve as backdrop for hundreds of photos a day.

KICKING OFF THE CELEBRATION

on day one, Daniels welcomed everyone, acting as master of ceremonies in a sparkling gold jacket ("my favorite color," he declared). The star introduced Dan Madsen, president of the Official Star Wars Fan Club and publisher of the *Star Wars Insider*. Madsen's company, Fantastic Media, produced the Celebration, which was also sponsored by Pepsi and Decipher along with LucasArts, Lucasfilm and *Star Wars Insider*.

Sadly, the tragic high school shootings in nearby Littleton had occurred just 10 days before the event. Madsen asked the audience for a moment of silence for the students and community. In addition to the moment of silence, thousands of memorial ribbons colored silver and blue (the school's colors) were distributed, and fans were able to donate money to three memorial funds. Over the weekend, nearly \$30,000 was raised from fan donations and matching funds from Lucasfilm Ltd., Hasbro Inc., Lego Systems Ltd., and PepsiCo.

After the emotional beginning, the lights dimmed on Stage A, and the giant movie screen flickered with a familiar face: director George Lucas, standing with Ewan McGregor on the steps of Abbey Road Studios. Lucas, who was still needed to oversee the film, apologized for not being in Denver. McGregor said a film shoot in Dublin would keep him occupied. Lucas nodded to his Obi-Wan Kenobi standing next to him: "This is our emerging character," Lucas said. "In the next film, he is huge—if he's not huge now."

McGregor looked at Lucas and laughed, "Really?"

Daniels, keeping things moving on Stage A, played the part of showman, interviewer, cheerleader, and spirit guide for the fans. The weather on opening day was fairly miserable, but Daniels kept the mood light, gliding



photo: Bruce Brown



photo: Chris Butler

THE WINGS OVER THE ROCKIES AIR AND SPACE MUSEUM



photo: Kevin Fitzpatrick



photo: Chris Butler

FANS GATHER JUST OUTSIDE THE HANGAR



STAR WARS FAN CLUB PRESIDENT DAN HADSEN

FOR THOSE 30,000 IN ATTENDANCE, THE CELEBRATION WAS LIKE A BIRTHDAY PARTY YOU'D ANTICIPATED FOR OVER 10 YEARS.

onstage twirling an umbrella. As lightsabers waved over the crowd, audience members were enthralled by the parade of stars, sneak peeks, and surprises.

There were world premieres all weekend, including the music video for John Williams' "Duel of Fates" and the six Episode I television commercials. In addition to Lucas and McGregor, video greetings also came from Ian McDiarmid and John Williams. The Lucasfilm documentary crew unspooled footage from the many behind-the-scenes interviews from the sets in England and Tunisia to the workshops at Industrial Light & Magic and Skywalker Ranch.

For fans, soggy or not, the excitement of the weekend coupled with the feverish anticipation for Episode I made for a potent combination.

"I think it's awesome," said Brian Hackett, a theater student who drove from Carthage, Tennessee, and dressed in costume as an older

Anakin Skywalker. "We had a bit of a weather problem but everyone came out and showed their spirit. It's a great day for the fans. I think *The Phantom Menace* is going to be the starting point for a new *Star Wars* generation."

BUT IT WAS THE ACTORS ON HAND for the Celebration who caused the biggest buzz of the weekend. Some are new to the experience and have never been exposed to the *Star Wars* legion. For Pernilla August, 41, who has built a career in art house Ingmar Bergman films with limited exposure, the Denver trip was her fandom baptism—and the actress seemed as receptive to her new fans as her character, Shmi, is supportive of her young son. All of the stars joined question-and-answer sessions with the audience in two huge tents, which added to the spirit of a religious revival experience. Daniels was the M.C. for Stage A and *Insider* managing editor Scott Chernoff led

the discussion on Stage B.

The sessions that drew the most gasps were for Darth Maul himself, Ray Park. The British martial arts expert-turned-actor leaped and jumped through a routine he developed for international competitions. The fans went wild. Many of the questions for Park were about his makeup (he revealed he fell asleep in the chair each morning) or about his stunt work and lightsaber duels with Liam Neeson and McGregor.

"You had to be careful because if you were a bit slack and weren't concentrating on what you were doing, you'd get a lightsaber in your head, finger, or your eye," Park said. "So the safety aspect was a big concern—you had to be on the ball 101 percent all day."

Lloyd, dressed in standard fourth-grader jeans and white T-shirt, introduced the crowd to his parents and his younger sister, Madison, who appears briefly at the end of Episode I. With a sly smile, Lloyd said he had the time of his life playing young Anakin, a kid a lot like himself.

"Pernilla could tell you all kinds of stories about the hovel and all the little gizmos in there," Lloyd said. "Between takes I'd play with this thing that looked like a dentist's tool that had a headset and magnifying glasses. So I'd sneak up behind my sister and say, 'Open up!'"

The biggest laughs came for Ahmed Best, a supremely gifted actor-musician-comedian who had the crowd rolling in the rain puddles. "It's fantastic, it's really big and cool," Best said of the Celebration. "I'm enjoying it and having fun. It's all about the fans—the fans are fantastic and that's why I like being here."

Best, whose work as Jar Jar was still largely unfamiliar to the fans at the time of the event, said the questions fans asked cracked him up, but one in particular was his favorite: "Someone asked me whether I was real person or not. I said, 'No, it's all animation. I'm completely digital. I'm not even here.'"

The fans opened their hearts for August, who is the new #1 mom in the galaxy. Many wanted to know all about the Skywalker matriarch and her role in the saga, yet she admitted she knows little of the back-story and isn't sure yet if she will return in Episodes II or III. But August said that having three young kids herself may have helped her play the part of Shmi.

"She is a very good mom," August said. "She is really taking care of her son, but she is also concerned that he should listen to his own feelings and listen to his own intuition. I like that very much because I think it's very important for a mother to do that. She is very strong in a way, but she will never give him guilt for anything."

Longtime fantasy film fans recognized Hugh Quarshie from *Highlander* and *Wing Commander*, but in Denver they got to ask about Panaka. Quarshie said one of the things that puzzled him was why his character only carried the rank of cap-

Master of Ceremonies Anthony Daniels introduces the fans to an old friend at the opening of the Star Wars Celebration.

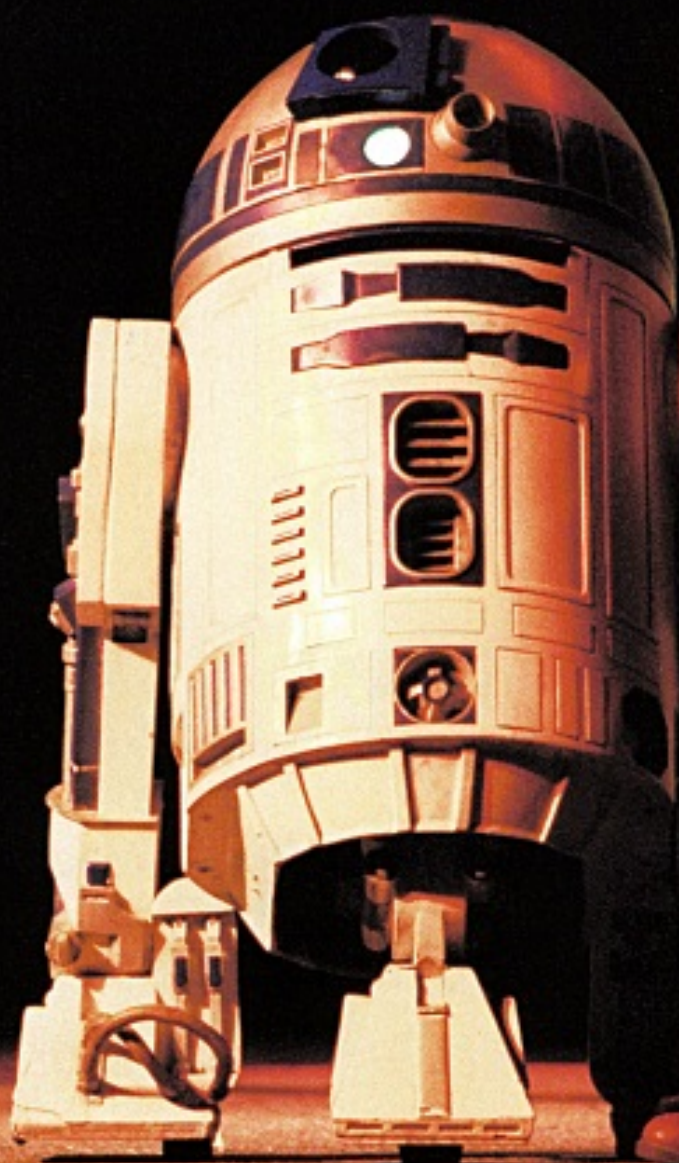


photo: Lucas Gilman

photo: Kevin Fitzpatrick



New Yorkers Morgan Phillips and Michael Cruz chill out in hip-hop Star Wars regalia at the Star Wars Celebration. Michael is now the proud papa of a Star Wars-named child (see end of page 34).

tain—and that he hopes the events of *The Phantom Menace* earn him a promotion.

"I think of Panaka as somebody who has to be as tough as he can be, just so the Jedi can be tougher," Quarshie said with a hearty laugh. "So in that respect I guess he is somewhere between Lando Calrissian and Han Solo, but he doesn't have the criminal tendencies. He's a law-abiding version."

Besides Daniels, the only other actors from previous *Star Wars* films at the Celebration were Warwick Davis (Wicket from *Return of the Jedi*, and also Wald in Episode I) and John Morton, who played Rebel pilot Dack in *The Empire Strikes Back*.

Davis, who continues his string of playing Lucas characters with "W" names, actually has three parts (see page 60 of *insider* #39 for a photo of him as "Weazel") in Episode I, the biggest being Wald, the Rodian friend of Anakin. "I would love to play a Jedi character," Davis told the audience. "Because of my stature, I would be quite powerful. I'd have a lightsaber, a short version. Put that idea on the Internet!"

For the actors new to the *Star Wars* galaxy, there was one common bond: toys. "It's not every day that someone tells you you're an action figure—I think that takes care of this year's Christmas presents," Quarshie chuckled.

Park said he couldn't believe his luck when the Royal Mail knocked on his door. "When I was sent the action figures, I got this big box," Park said. "I was opening it and saying, 'Whoa! Whoa!' I was like a kid again."

And nobody got more toys from Lucas Licensing than Lloyd: "You know what's scary?" he asked. "People can pop my head off with the little Lego figures."

It wasn't only the actors who got all the attention that weekend—the behind-the-scenes crew also thrilled the crowd. Leading the way was producer Rick McCallum, familiar to fans from three years (and counting) of *Prequel Updates* in the *insider*.

There was no mistaking that McCallum, with sunglasses hanging around his neck and hair swept back, had just arrived from California—specifically from the screening room at Skywalker Ranch, where Lucas had finished Episode I the day before. The producer said he and co-editor Ben Burtt had just screened the final "check print" with Lucas. McCallum said he almost couldn't believe the four-year process was over. With the audience hanging on every word, McCallum said that as the lights went up after their first viewing of the completed *Phantom Menace*, Lucas turned to him and said, "Well, I guess it's time to start working on Episode II." Once again, the crowd went wild.

The producer said Lucas would "absolutely" direct the next chapter of the saga and the art department meetings were to begin immediately. The script will be ready around September 1999, casting will be announced in January 2000, and

filming will begin in June 2000, with a release two years later. "It will be bold to cast Anakin," he hinted.

LUCASFILM ARTISTS UNVEILED some amazing visual displays. Slide shows of pre-pro-

duction sketches, photos and paintings showed the stunning amount of preparation that went into crafting Episode I. From the Lucasfilm archives, costumes and props were brought out so fans could see the enormous detail that went into each piece. Whether it was Anakin's Podracer or



AHMED BEST LANDS THE MOTHERSHIP AT THE JAR JAR JAM

by Kevin Fitzpatrick

One of the most rollicking highlights of the *Star Wars* Celebration was the only off-site activity on the schedule: Ahmed Best's "Jar Jar Jam" at the Temple Events Center, on the site of a historic 100-year-old church in Denver. Being there was like hitting some kind of glorious Gungan music festival, and the Force-ful energy flowed through the night.

Imagine a high school dance from some weird galaxy where the attendees are all either (a) music-loving *Star Wars* fiends; or (b) clueless to music but such hardcore fans they had to catch this show. Both groups had a rocking good time and made it one Saturday night that will long be remembered.

Some fans didn't realize that Best is an accomplished musician, formerly of the group The Jazz Hole (with three albums on Blue Note records) as well as a cast member from the off-Broadway hit *Stomp*. For his 75-minute show, Best ripped through hip-hop, rock and dance music that moved the audience of 400 to get on the dance floor and try out their Jar Jar moves. It was a humorous scene to watch blaster-toting stormtroopers shake their bodies with other costumed fans dressed as Boba Fett and Princess Leia (in her Jabba's palace costume, of course). Darth Vader strode across the dance floor, the disco lights shining off his helmet as Best laid down phat beats.

To kick off the show, Ray Park jumped on stage to introduce Best and his bandmates. The crowd went absolutely bonkers as the hip new Sith Lord strode onstage and whooped it up for the fans. To boisterous applause, the high-octane Best jumped to the front of the stage, clad in a tight, psychedelic Chewbacca T-shirt, and treated fans to a human beat-box version of John Williams' *Star Wars* Main Title music before whipping into the band's standard set.

Best drew a large crowd of his comrades from Episode I. In addition to Park, who at one point got on the microphone and laid an impromptu London rap on everyone, other stars who stopped by the Temple Events Center included Jake and Madison Lloyd, Pernilla August, Rick McCallum, and Lucasfilm public relations maven Lynne Hale. At the end of the show, Best pulled an excited McCallum onstage, leading the audience in chants of "Go Ricky, go Ricky, go!"

Anyone who thinks that *Star Wars* fans might need a Jedi mind trick to be able to dance should think again: all it took was a creative DJ, who spun "Weird Al" Yankovic's "Yoda" and a trove of other *Star Wars* musical treasures before Best took the stage, to get the fans dancing like the Death Star had just been destroyed. It was an amazing sight. ☺



THE LIFE-SIZE X-WING FIGHTER



STAR WARS TIMELINE

the remote-controlled R2-D2 unit (along with operator Don Bies), each piece was another little bit of the *Star Wars* magic.

Other highlights from the archives included models of a TIE fighter and the *Millennium Falcon* from the original trilogy, and Qui-Gon and Obi-Wan's lightsabers from Episode I. Additionally,



A LIFE-SIZE BATTLE DROID MODEL STANDS WATCH OVER THE LUCASFILM ARCHIVES

Lucasfilm unveiled two giant time-lines, using huge pictures and other visuals to convey the story of the *Star Wars* saga and the history of the *Star Wars* films.

For the first time ever, the prequel's team of designers and craftsmen traveled together to put on a show for the fans of what they did to translate

MY CELEBRATION MEMORIES

by Scott Chernoff

May 3, 1999 Colorado

DEAR FELLOW FAN,

As I write this letter to you, I am in the air somewhere above the clouds of Colorado on my way home to California—but I don't want to go home. I want the *Star Wars* Celebration to go on forever—I want to return to the rain (yes, the rain), the people, the fun. Instead, all I can do is write down these memories while they're fresh—although I'm not likely to forget soon.

My experience at the Celebration was different from most other fans'. Yes, I had the supercool Sebulba all-access pass, but that doesn't mean I used it much—as MC of Stage B, I spent most of my time in the Dagobah-meets-Otoh-Gunga-like swamps of what I called "my tent." I was plenty nervous—after all, how could I possibly compete with Stage A's MC, Anthony Daniels, one of the biggest stars in the *Star Wars* universe? (I tried to tell the audience I played Hammerhead in *A New Hope*—they didn't buy it.)

I managed to watch a little of Anthony's act, but that was even more intimidating—the man is a pro, a charismatic figure beloved by the fans, witty and quick on his feet. I, on the other hand, am the dork who interviews Dengar for a living. But it was an honor even to be in the same sphere as Anthony—I can't tell you how excited I was to get to know him and bond with him over our mutually-strained vocal chords and sore feet. I mean, this was the golden droid, the magic man himself—C-3PO! And there was me, following him around like some demented R2-D2 and loving every minute of it.

When I did get to wander the hangar, my favorite booth was the *Star Wars* Kids area, where I watched kids beam with pride as they learned to draw droids and Sith lords. I relaxed there by drawing my own Darth Maul—it was almost as good as the one drawn by the 7-year-old girl to my right.



RAY PARK (D) WITH SCOTT CHERNOFF

CONTINUED ON PAGE 73

Lucas' screenplay to the screen. Each shed light on how to take words on a page to create movie fantasies on the screen.

For costume designer Trisha Biggar and concept artist Iain McCaig, the same question came up at all three of their presentations: have they written their Academy Award acceptance speeches yet? Even from the back of the room, one could probably tell they were both blushing.

Standing next to their Queen Amidala Senate appearance gown and headpiece, the pair explained that the costumes in the new film are deliberately more elaborate than in the classic trilogy. They said that since the only locale with previous exposure was Tatooine, they were free to introduce new fashions and costumes to the Saga.

McCaig said he was inspired by Victorian and Art Nouveau styles in his designs for Episode I. Biggar and her core staff of 40 people painstakingly designed and assembled more than 1,000 costumes from these concepts. In a video clip the pair screened, actress Natalie Portman said with a smile that as a queen, you couldn't wear the same thing twice.

"The Queen comes from a beautiful planet and all the people wore flowing, beautiful clothes," Biggar explained in her Scottish accent. "It led from there that the Queen had more elaborate outfits than the others. We always see the Queen in formal situations, never in a situation where she would be less than a queen, really, so that is why she is dressed so formally."

The two designers who had probably the most impact on the film were design director Doug Chiang and concept artist Terry Whitlatch. Chiang designed the ships and hardware, Whitlatch the creatures. She had previously worked on *Jumanji*, so the task of dreaming up new creatures was a challenge she relished, Whitlatch said.

Chiang, who showed his portfolio to Lucas and McCallum more than five years ago to try to land the job as top conceptual artist, said, "Personality is the one thing George really wants in his machinery."

"The idea of the battle droids was to make them smaller and thinner, so you couldn't get a guy in the costume," Chiang continued. "George wanted to approach these robots as all digital, so we're trying to break through and create a design that is really impossible to do any other way."

One name that is well known to any true *Star Wars* fan is Ben Burtt. He won an Academy Award for the classic sound design he created for *Star Wars* more than 22 years ago, and returned to Episode I not just as supervising sound editor, but also as a film co-editor. Burtt, who created R2-D2's chirps and the hum of the lightsaber, was relaxed and casual onstage. The fans ate it up.

"The largest beast you hear in the movie is really the roar of my baby daughter, Emma," the proud papa revealed. "She has this little, distinctive cry. I thought it would be fun to record that and to



CELEBRATION STARS [1] Jake Lloyd takes a question; [2] Rick McCallum opens his arms to *Star Wars* fans; [3] Ray Park strikes a pose; [4] Pernilla August gets a warm reception; [5] Anthony Daniels admires Trisha Biggar's work on one of Queen Amidala's gowns; [6] Hugh Quarshie makes contact; [7] Terry Whitlatch and Doug Chiang chat with Anthony Daniels; [8] Terry Brooks entertains the crowd; [9] Warwick Davis poses with fan Ilise Lauthier. [photos by Lucas Gilman except [9] uncredited]





photo: Heidi Erbogast



photo: Kevin Hittsback



photo: Heidi Erbogast



photo: Jason Gilman



photo: Chris Butler



photo: Heidi Erbogast

FORCEFUL FANS [1] A young fan is surrounded by dark forces; [2] Taylor Dipoto of Littleton makes a great Leia; [3] Ray Park meets a Mini-Maul as Anakin attacks; [4] Lego builders put the finishing touches on a massive Sabot starfighter; [5] Imperial forces pose with an enemy astromech droid; [6] A Slave Leia with her attendant; [7] Young fan Zoe Ortiz is an adorable Ewok on the prowl; [8] Two fans pose with Has Amedda; [9] A young Jedi encounters R2-D2; [10] Budding artists hone their craft at the Star Wars Kids booth.



photo: Heidi Erbogast



photo: Chris Butler



Photo: Lucas Gilman
LUCASFILM PRESIDENT GORDON RADLEY (LEFT) WITH PRODUCER RICK MCCALLUM

make it the biggest roar possible, and we did."

Nick Dudman, the live action creature effects supervisor, answered a question from a hardcore fan who had studied the second trailer. Why, if Yoda was 900 years old, did he look so much younger if the new movie was set less than 50 years before *Empire*? Simple, Dudman replied. When we see Yoda in *Empire*, he is on the run, hiding out, dispirited, and weak. In Episode I, he is powerful and at the peak of his powers. This isn't just a younger Yoda: it is a more powerful and strong Jedi Master.

IN THE MAIN HANGAR, more than two dozen companies with licenses for *Star Wars* items showed off their new lines of merchandise, including LucasArts, with an entire "GameScape" area that not only debuted the new Episode I games *Star Wars: Racer* and *Star Wars: The Phantom Menace*, but also offered free-play on the original arcade games for *Star Wars*, *The Empire Strikes Back*, and *Return of the Jedi*; Hasbro, which unveiled its entire line of new *Star Wars* toys; Decipher, hosting several packed *Star Wars* Customizable Card Game tournaments to kick off its new Young Jedi series; Lego, whose area featured amazing life-size Lego versions of Darth Vader, R2-D2, and a battle droid; *Star Wars Kids* magazine, where *Star Wars* artists taught children how to draw their favorite characters; and other familiar *Star Wars* names like Topps, Applause and Ballantine/Del Rey/Ballantine Books, with new *Star Wars* authors Terry Brooks and R.A. Salvatore also on hand, to the delight of fiction fans.

Other highlights inside included costumed characters like Chewbacca and stormtroopers for photo opportunities; a THX room, where the Smithsonian documentary *Star Wars: The Magic of Myth* screened; and the video room, where the *Insider* screened *Star Wars* rarities including the Boba Fett cartoon from the *Star Wars Holiday Special*, old toy commercials, spoofs like *Troops*, the Warwick Davis "mockumentary" *Return of the Ewok*, and much more.

Outside, the fans walked from exhibit hall to the store to snap up official products, chowed down on food from Taco Bell, KFC, and Pizza Hut in an outdoor dining tent, took part in trivia contests,

MY CELEBRATION MEMORIES from page 70

But most of all, my time and memories were dominated by Stage B. On Friday, I wasn't scheduled to start until John Morton's interview at 1pm—but at 9:45am, *Insider* editor-in-chief Jon Snyder told me, "Scott, we're going to open the doors to get everybody out of the rain. I need you to go on at 10," Jon said, followed by these terrifying words: "Wing it!"

So, from 10 until 12:30, I winged it, taking questions from the audience about Episode I, Episode II, books, comics and all things *Star Wars*. I'm happy to report the fans who packed into Stage B that morning were awesome! In fact, everyone who came to my tent that weekend rocked—the fans couldn't have been more enthusiastic, more willing to put up with the elements, or more fun.

Of course, the guests were incredible too. Ray Park drove the crowd nuts, and he is as nice a guy as Darth Maul is not. One of my favorite memories of Stage B was when I mediated the Hugh Quarshie-Ahmed Best truce—the two stars had been good-naturedly making fun of each other during their interviews, and during Ahmed's final talk, Hugh snuck in and, in a strangely unrecognizable voice, mocked Ahmed from afar. Everybody looked around to find where this mysterious voice was coming from, only to discover Hugh Quarshie—the stoic Captain Panaka—crouching behind the sound equipment with a wireless microphone and a devilish grin. When Hugh got on stage and hugged Ahmed like the friends they are, everybody cheered.

I'll also never forget interviewing Rick McCallum on stage. Rick was totally cool, and he loved the fans. But there was one moment when I was interviewing him that I drifted off and it hit me: here I was, the geeky *Star Wars* fan, sitting side-by-side on stage with the producer of the new *Star Wars* film, which by the way was finally here. How did this happen? What an honor, and what a thrill. At that moment, I gazed to the side of the tent and looked through the window only to see a guy dressed as a stormtrooper march by, as if on patrol. Surreal and powerful. I got a huge, goofy grin, looked over to Rick, whose eyes were gleaming as he spoke to the fans, and returned to the here and now.

An absolute highlight for me was the *Jar Jar Jam*—I finally got to hang out with fans and friends (what's the difference?), dance with reckless abandon despite my exhaustion (and despite the fact that I can't dance), and watch Ahmed rock out on stage with a joyously freestyling Ray Park. As I watched them, it occurred to me I was witnessing the next generation of *Star Wars* take flight before my eyes.

But as much fun as I had at the JJJ, there is one moment that stands out more than any other in my mind right now. It was on Sunday, when the full brunt of exhaustion was hitting me and my voice was in danger of retreating perhaps forever. Warwick Davis was on stage. Now, I knew this guy had a following, but I never realized how vast, diverse, and devoted that following is. Warwick was consistently gracious and hilarious, and clearly an inspiration to fans (many of whom clamored for a Willow sequel), who see in him a "short" (as Warwick puts it) man who has triumphed as an artist, a father, and a person despite the obvious obstacles to his success.

At one point, a fan asked Warwick what he thought of people who don't like Ewoks. Warwick acknowledged that Ewoks make cute toys and many people are averse to that, but he added that merchandising is not their purpose, that George Lucas "doesn't need to work that way." He went on: "I think the idea of the Ewoks, which I quite liked, was that no matter how small you are, or how little you feel, you can triumph over anything if you believe in yourself and your heart is in the right place."

Now, maybe it was the accumulated hours of craziness at the convention and lack of sleep, but I believe it was the power of Warwick's words that sent chills down my spine and nearly brought me to tears as the audience rose to cheer his answer. This, I thought to myself, is *Star Wars*—and this is the spirit, the idea, the ideal that we had all come together to celebrate. Warwick had just summed it all up, and at that moment we all knew that the Ewoks' story was not only Warwick's real-life story, not only the story of *Star Wars*, but our story as well. We had come together, in the wake of horrific tragedy nearby, to say that while the dark side is out there, the light side, the right side, the good means so much more, and can never be extinguished. It was no coincidence that the clouds had broken and the sun was shining brightly that day as the actor spoke.

This plane is about to land, and I will soon return to my daily life. Next weekend, I'm off to New York City for the Episode I press junket, which will no doubt be very cool. But I know at this moment that nothing will ever touch this weekend I spent with my fellow *Star Wars* fans. The Force, my friends, will be with us, always... and so will Denver. ♡

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 58

held him there easily, with just one hand, while his other hand reached down to Anakin's belt and pulled free his lightsaber.

"What?" Anakin started to ask, but then his surprise multiplied many times over and he yelled out, "Hey!" as Chewie brought the lightsaber into his mouth and made a move as if he meant to bite the thing.

Aside from the risk of blowing his head off if he released the energy within that hilt, Chewie's threats to scratch or damage Anakin's precious instrument unsettled the boy profoundly. He yelled at Chewie again and reached up for the lightsaber, but the Wookiee elbowed his hand away and scolded him profoundly.

"Okay, I get it," Anakin replied, head down, for the Wookiee's comparisons between Anakin's feelings for the lightsaber and Chewie's own for the *Falcon* certainly hit the point. "I get it," he said again.

Chewie howled, hardly seeming satisfied.

"We'll fix it!" an exasperated Anakin assured him.

FOR A FEW MOMENTS, Luke continued to envision the problems a younger Han might have caused to those adults around him. Han cocked his head at Luke, apparently noting his expression, and smirked. "How'd your meeting go?"

"Wonderful," Luke answered sarcastically.

"How else could any meeting chaired by Borsk Fey'lya go?"

"They've got their problems," Han said. "Borsk and his friends are finding that managing a galaxy isn't as easy as they believed."

"So they find scapegoats," Luke said.

"Such as . . .," Han prompted.

"A problem along the Outer Rim," Luke explained. "Someone's banging blasters with smugglers. Jedi, they believe, and that's not to the liking of Fyor Rodan or Niuk Niuv."

"Probably costing them a fortune," Han reasoned with a wry grin.

"Whatever the reason, the council's not happy about it."

"Which means they're laying it on you," Han said. "Well, what are we to do about it?" Han's tone made it pretty clear that he didn't think highly of intervening.

"Didn't you tell me that Lando was out there, mining asteroids or something?" Luke asked, and Han's expression soured.

"He's out there," Han replied. "Pair of planets called Dubrillion and Destrillion, near an asteroid system he modestly named Lando's Folly."

"I need a thread to hang on," Luke explained. "Maybe a little insider information."

"That'd be Lando," Han agreed. He didn't sound particularly enamored of the idea.

Luke understood the man's apparent reticence and recognized it for pure bluster. Han and Lando were friends—dear friends—but there always seemed to be a reluctance from both to publicly admit it. "Maybe," Luke said. "Lando always seems to know what's going on, and if I find out the inside story, I might be able to use it to persuade a couple of councilors to see things my way."

Han started to nod, then blinked and stared at Luke curiously. "You been hanging around me too long," he remarked. "What are you smiling at?" he asked Jacen, who was beaming at Luke's side.

"The belt," Jacen said. "Jaina's going to be pretty happy about this."

"The belt?" Luke asked.

"Running the belt," Jacen explained, but Luke's expression remained curious.

"Lando's got an operation going on the side," Han explained. "Calls it running the belt. It's a game—and there's probably more than a little betting going on around it—where pilots test their skills by zipping around the asteroids, seeing how long they can stay in the place before getting bumped away."

"Blasted away, you mean," Luke said. "Into little pieces. Doesn't sound like a promising career."

"Only one pilot's been hurt," Jacen interjected, drawing a surprised look from Luke. "Jaina told me," he explained. "Lando modified some TIE fighters with walls of repulsor shields so that they can take a hit, or two, or ten, and just bounce away."

"It's supposed to be one of the highlights of the galaxy," Han replied. "But I'm betting there's more to it than just a game."

Luke nodded and didn't have to ask for clarification. He had heard a couple of reports of smugglers diving into asteroid belts to evade pursuit. Perhaps Lando's game was providing some interesting training.

"You want to go and visit him?" Han asked. "He's not on especially good terms with the New Republic these days."

"Is he ever?"

"He's likely running a few side businesses the New Republic would see as less than legitimate," Han added.

"Isn't he always?"

That brought a chuckle from Han, but just for a moment. "What about Mara?"

he asked seriously. "They'll be back soon, and from what I hear, things didn't go very well."

That hit home to Luke, a reminder, as everything seemed to be a reminder, that his beloved wife was not well. The best doctors in the galaxy were shaking their heads helplessly, able to do nothing but watch as something inside Mara continually altered her molecular structure. No medicine, no therapy, had come close to treating the rare disease, and only her own internal strength, her use of the Force, was somewhat keeping it in check. Those others who had contracted the disease had not been so fortunate.

So what would a trek across the galaxy do to her? Luke had to wonder. Would it be too much? Would it put her in a dangerous position?

"Aunt Mara just went to Rhommamool," Jacen reminded. "That's three days' travel, and she didn't find any vacation once she got there."

"True enough," Han said. "Maybe a run to the Outer Rim, far away from the council, will do her, and my wife, good."

Luke shrugged and nodded, and so it seemed settled.

They heard 22-32 beeping wildly then, Chewie wailed, and the number-seven repulsorlift coil fired to life.

And then there came another explosion from inside the *Falcon*, and the lift coil sputtered out.

Anakin came storming down the landing ramp. "That's it!" he grumbled. "I'm done."

Before Han could even begin to yell at him, though, a huge, hairy paw landed on the boy's shoulder and yanked him back inside, and Anakin's feeble attempt at any protest was blasted away by a tremendous Wookiee roar.

Han blew a sigh and tossed his wrench over his shoulder, to clang on the metal floor.

"Teenagers," Luke remarked, tossing a wink at Jacen. ☺

For a few moments, Luke continued to envision the problems a younger Han might have caused those adults around him. Han cocked his head at Luke, apparently noting his expression and smirked. "How'd your meeting go?"

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AURRA SINGS THE BLUES

A NEW BOUNTY HUNTER GLIMPSED BRIEFLY IN EPISODE I STARS IN HER OWN DARK HORSE COMIC

by Peet Janes

» With the release of *The Phantom Menace*, Dark Horse Comics suddenly has a cavalcade of new characters to develop. Indeed, it has been the hallmark of Lucasfilm that characters appear—and remain—in the *Star Wars* universe with stunning regularity, and it has been Dark Horse Comics' privilege to pay homage to those characters, playing our part in keeping them alive and fresh. But now with Episode I, we not only have a flurry of new charges—but this time, we also get to play alongside their creators as a new chapter in the saga unfolds.

Back in November of last year, Allan Kausch at Lucas Licensing faxed a Doug Chiang sketch to Dark Horse. Even before we were told what this new piece of reference was for, we could sense the genesis of a character. That's a testament to Doug Chiang's skill as an artist, to be sure, but the fact that it was another piece of the *Star Wars* puzzle was enough to give it the spark of life that allowed our minds to start speculating. Allan's explanation came along shortly: a new bounty hunter was haunting the spacelanes of the Republic, and it was up to Dark Horse to develop her character.

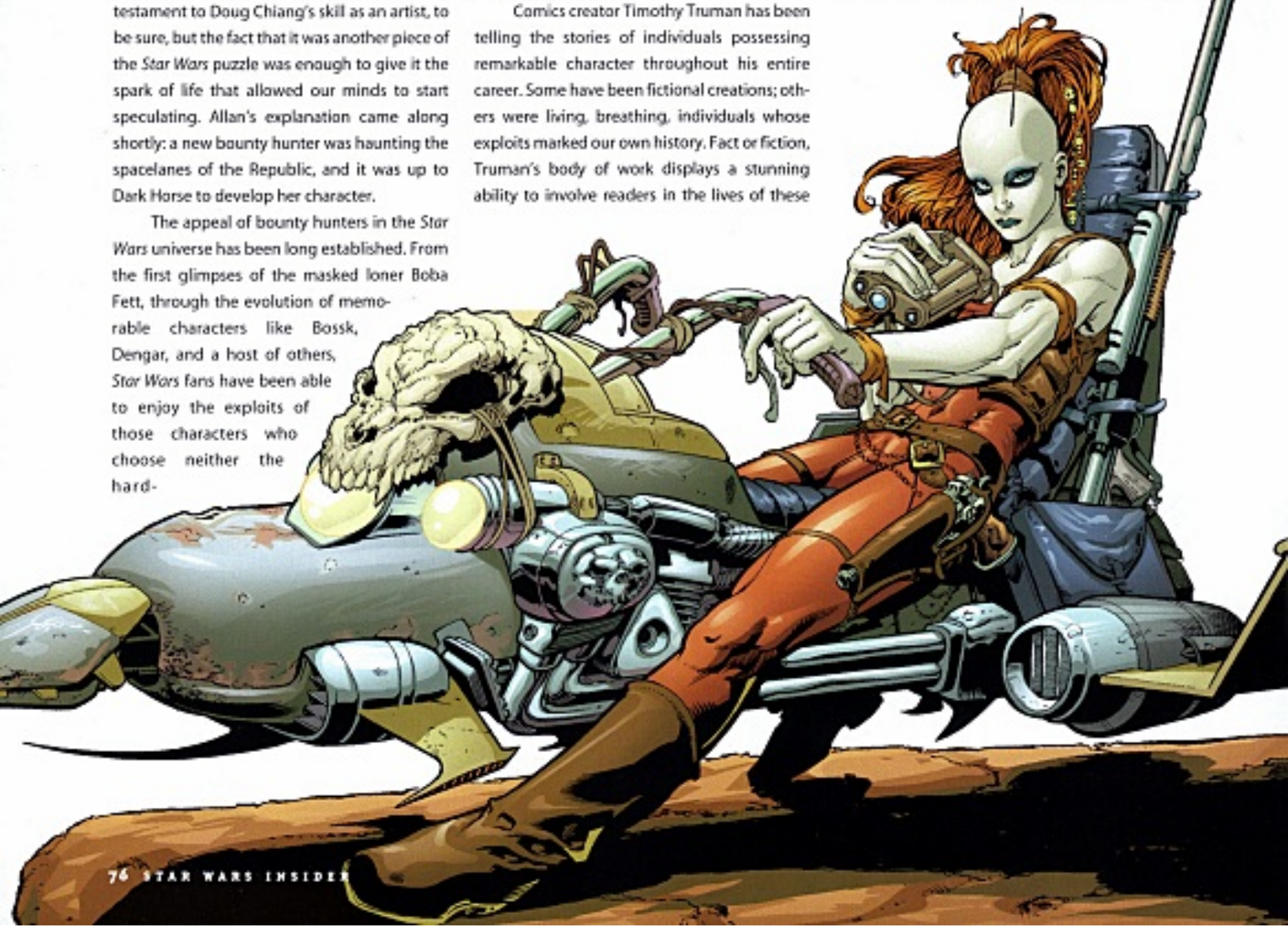
The appeal of bounty hunters in the *Star Wars* universe has been long established. From the first glimpses of the masked loner Boba Fett, through the evolution of memorable characters like Bossk, Dengar, and a host of others, *Star Wars* fans have been able to enjoy the exploits of those characters who choose neither the hard-

ened, dark order of the Empire nor the righteous light of the Rebel Alliance. Walking in the gray, shadowy area between cosmic conflicts, they are some of the most fiercely individual of *Star Wars* characters.

Comics creator Timothy Truman has been telling the stories of individuals possessing remarkable character throughout his entire career. Some have been fictional creations; others were living, breathing, individuals whose exploits marked our own history. Fact or fiction, Truman's body of work displays a stunning ability to involve readers in the lives of these

individuals through masterful storytelling. Recently, Truman offered a slice of the young Anakin Skywalker's life in the *Star Wars: Episode I Anakin Skywalker* one-shot, and followed with the current "Outlander" story arc in the *Star Wars* monthly series. For these, Truman left the art chores to his collaborators, but it was always my intention as editor—and fan of Tim's work—to engage his services as an artist.

Truman's artwork can be very simply described as alive. While it shares a busyness of linework with the contemporary comics



styles in vogue since the genesis of Image Comics, Truman's lines are freehand and uncontrolled, suggesting life much more effectively than the harsh regularity of more graphic-design-oriented styles. Truman's work subscribes to the belief that life is never perfect, and always in motion.

After all, George Lucas was able to spirit us all away to another universe that mirrored our own by creating worlds where starships sometimes ran as ineffectively as the beat-up car in our driveway, dust and water tainted the clean lines of a stormtrooper's armor, and the stories of immense struggle and personal sacrifice were written in the lines of characters' faces. Picking up the storytelling gauntlet thrown by Lucas, Truman is in his element, and

Aurra's life was to have been much more complex than many of her fellow characters. Her motivations ran deep and were based on her own wild journey through the *Star Wars* universe. As the "character bible" developed, we quickly realized that it would become necessary for us to determine how much of this material would be shown, and how much needed to remain hidden. For many creators this is the most challenging and rewarding task: give readers too little to go on, and their interest moves elsewhere; give them too much, and they quickly tire of the character and move along. But behind the scenes, the creator must spend long hours with a character, generating page after page of backstory investigating the dark corners and highlights, the motivations to

involved: a glimpse, Aurra standing quietly above the Boonta Eve Podrace and stealing the scene without saying a word. The long lines of her body, her impressive array of personal armaments, her wickedly long fingers, a single antenna sprouting from the crown of her bald

» The appeal of bounty hunters in the *Star Wars* universe has been long established. From the first glimpses of the masked loner Boba Fett, through the evolution of memorable characters like Bossk, Dengar and a host of others...

when it became time to develop the Episode I-era bounty hunter Aurra Sing, the choice of creator was obvious.

"Something immediately clicked," says Truman. "I heard no more than the name and 'new female bounty hunter.' I hadn't even seen the production photos or the Chiang sketch yet. I immediately said, 'I want her! Give her to me!' You have to realize that the reason I have a job in comics today is due to the illustrations and sketches of outer-space bounty hunters and mercenaries that just filled my portfolio when I approached the art director at First Comics, way back in 1983 or 1984. So I guess you could say I've always had this raging affinity for that type of character, and there's something in my storytelling style, whether writing or drawing, that seems to help me know how to make that sort of character work."

Truman himself isn't even sure why Aurra Sing specifically appealed to him so much. "I don't know why, but Aurra just sort of called out to me: 'Help, Tim! Develop me!' I got very enthusiastic and passionate about her right off the bat, with only a few words said about her. I don't know why she and I clicked like we did. However, I was glad that my enthusiasm paid off. Everyone seemed to detect that I had a line into Aurra's personality." From the Dark Horse point of view, Truman would be a natural for developing the story of the enigmatic loner.

action, and the humdrum aspects of basic survival. Many writers say that, at this point, their characters tell them what they would do.

Truman agrees. "This is quite true," he says. "Any character who doesn't do it should be immediately relegated to subservient walk-on roles with no lines. Saying a character 'tells you what he should do' really just refers to a state of mind that you arrive at with good characters wherein you know exactly what they're all about. You imbue them with as much personality as exists in real people whom we know—perhaps even more, because with fictional characters we create, we're privy to their innermost thoughts as well as every bone of every skeleton in every little closet of their lives."

Insofar as my characters go, after a while, I've 'helped' them develop enough of a personality that when you create a situation or event for them to react to, you know just what they'll do and what they'll say. And then, when things really get rolling, and the reader also gets to know the character very well, then you can throw monkey wrenches into the works—have a character react to something in a manner that's totally unexpected and contrary to what the reader thought the character was all about."

With Aurra Sing, it would be necessary to involve the reader in the same manner that viewers of *The Phantom Menace* became



» **FACING:** Aurra Sing on Tatooine from the *The Bounty Hunters: Aurra Sing* by Timothy Truman. **RIGHT:** A character study photo of Aurra Sing [played by Nichonne Beurriaque].



head. Though the single-issue *The Bounty Hunters: Aura Sing* issue had already been scheduled, Truman could not resist the opportunity to include her in the developing "Outlander" storyline starring Ki-Adi-Mundi.

"Outlander" has Ki, newly inducted to the Jedi Council, returning to Tatooine on a mission to discover the whereabouts of a long-exiled Jedi Knight named Sharad Hett. The Jedi Council selects Ki because of his recent mission to Tatooine (to rescue his daughter in "Prelude to Rebellion"). Unfortunately for Ki, however, Aura Sing has also set her sights on Sharad Hett, and her own highly personal agenda calls for the death of the onetime Jedi. Should Ki-Adi-Mundi fall into target range, she wouldn't mind plugging him, either.

Scraps of knowledge of Aura's past is all Ki has to go on, but then again, so will the reader. Despite the fact that Lucasfilm, Dark Horse and Tim Truman have put many hours into creating an encyclopedic history of Aura Sing, only a portion of her story will be revealed in either *The Bounty Hunters: Aura Sing* or *Star Wars "Outlander."*

When asked about the irony of having to create significant backstory that readers will never see, Truman says, "I don't mind that it's writing work that readers will never see. As a matter of fact, I'm not even sure that they won't, especially when writing about Aura Sing or the self-exiled Tusken Jedi that I created, Sharad Hett. With every bit of dialogue that I write, I immediately scroll back through everything that I know or created about the charac-

"To warp an old adage, [the character is] an enigma wrapped in tragedy—with a big iron on its hip! She does some pretty outrageous things. She smiles a lot. But there's darkness to it." —Timothy Truman

ters' personalities and history.

"Aura's a very intense character to write," he continues. "I know her secret past. Every decision that she makes, every sentence she utters, every demon that drives her, is related totally to her past. She can't make a single move or say one word without her history being involved. This is no exaggeration! The character demands it in order to be able to work, perhaps more than any other character I've ever been involved with. She's a fun character. However, I know that behind that cocky smirk of hers is some very tragic stuff. So I don't mind working up a lot of information that people will never see. Because, in my mind, they are seeing it, if that character engages them. I've done this sort of 'pre-writing' and pre-planning with every major character I've ever worked on."

Truman said he had a specific type of character he wanted to create with Aura: "To warp an old adage, an enigma wrapped in tragedy—with a big iron on its hip! She's fun. She does some pretty outrageous things. She smiles a lot. But there's a darkness to it. When she's around, things automatically seem more dangerous and potentially out of control."

An important part of Truman's additions to the character would be her childlike quality. She's unquestionably an adult, but Truman wanted to give her an air of arrested development, as if her career was an extended series of tantrums against some obstacle long past, but never forgotten. "Aura speaks in very short, to-the-point sentences," Truman explains. "I have a formula that I use which keeps me in line when I write her dialogue: a specific number of words per sentence, and no more. It always works out."

"I've found that this gives her a certain duality: it makes her seem like a very tough and no-bull person. Yet on the other hand, it strongly suggests to the reader that Aura is quite reluctant to reveal too much about herself. Aura's one of the only characters in my *Star Wars* stories who is allowed to speak in captions! And when she does, she speaks directly to the reader. As soon as I tried doing it, I realized that this subtly gives the impression that she might not be talking to the reader as

much as she is talking to little voices that she's hearing in her head!"

The vast *Star Wars* universe grows ever larger, one character at a time. *The Bounty Hunters: Aura Sing* ships August 11. ☾



» LEFT: Cover artwork for *The Bounty Hunters: Aura Sing* by Timothy Truman. RIGHT: The Doug Chiang sketch that started it all, where the character is referred to simply as 'Boba Fett'.

me yelled, "Go, Skywalker!" I thought that was something that signifies the whole movie. It was amazing!

RACHEL WATSON Grove City, PA

THE PHANTOM MENACE

RULED! The critics don't know what they are talking about! Liam Neeson is one of my favorite actors, Darth Maul was pure evil, Anakin was the cutest little boy, and Jar Jar Binks is my new best friend! I'm fairly new to Star Wars fandom—I've only been into it for three years. I call myself a Jedi baby, due to the fact that I was born when *Return of the Jedi* was released, in 1983. (My older sister is an Empire baby—she was born in 1980.) I just want to say thanks, Star Wars, for the warm welcome, and I'm looking forward to Episode II!

ALISON MARCEAU Scituate, RI

I SAW EPISODE I on May 19 at a 2 p.m. showing. Can you say awesome a trillion times, two thumbs up, a bag of chips, and two Wookies?! I was in Star Wars heaven. Darth Maul looked like a ghost—most impressive. It was also cool to see Yoda walk—he's my hero. Your magazine rules—the covers are always done perfectly! Thank the maker!

TIM KOVREG Newark, OH

FIRST OF ALL, let me say that I never liked Star Wars. I thought the stories were childish and insulting, the dialogue pedantic. I saw the first movie when I was eight—it was the first movie I ever saw, and I loved the special effects. I wanted to be Luke and wanted a lightsaber, but I still disliked the story. Empire was a different matter: It was well-plotted and had a darker edge, all in all probably the best Star Wars movie.

Jedi, on the other hand, was simply unwatchable. The annoying lack of a decent story and those mind-numbing chase scenes through the forest induce a Dramamine addiction. The reviews for Episode I were negative and didn't make me want to go see it—they all said the same things, that it's a movie for kids, and that it's all special effects and not much of a story or heart. Boy, are they ever wrong!

The new movie is simply the best Star Wars movie ever. The Jedi scenes are awe-inspiring, the space battles are spectacular without being mind-numbing, and the story is adult and interesting. The dialogue is adult, except for the Jar Jar

character. The villain is respectable and not a campy, over-acted mess as in the *Batman* movies. I am converting to the Rebellion!

HARM BRAR Bakersfield, CA

EXCELLENT. After seeing Episode I three times in as many days, I can only beg for more. Standing in line nine hours for tickets for the first screening was more than worth it. I can't wait for Episode II! The only confusing part was when Qui-Gon and Darth Maul are separated by the laser beam doors and Qui-Gon kneels down and closes his eyes. What exactly is going on?

MIKE SWERDOWSKY, JR.
Willowick, OH

Mike, according to the screenplay, he's meditating.

I CAN'T BEGIN to tell you how much I enjoyed *The Phantom Menace*. What an incredible film! Never in my life have I seen a movie with such amazing and realistic digital effects. Jar Jar is really neat. It was so pleasant to watch a film that was done so well and was completely free of bad language. The movie was fantastic and I loved all the characters and the actors who portrayed them.

It's so neat to experience a sense of irony in the movie when you see Obi-Wan and Anakin meet for the first time. We all know how that friendship will eventually turn out! I saw Dan Madsen's cameo, and did anybody see the "E.T." creatures during the scene when Amidala asks the Senate for help? That was priceless! I can't wait for Episode II!

JEREMY AULT Chillicothe, OH

Yup, Jeremy, that's the *Insider's* own Dan Madsen in the celebration scene at the end (hint: there's a photo of Dan on page 66), and there are E.T.s in the Senate, as well as a Wookiee delegation (my favorite). You might also want to keep an eye out for Rick McCallum, editors Ben Burt and Martin Smith, Mark Hamill's son Nathan, and a craft from 2001: A Space Odyssey. Happy hunting!

I JUST SAW EPISODE I The Phantom Menace and was completely blown away by it. The Phantom Menace is and will be my favorite movie, probably until I see Episode II, and I cannot wait to read the novelization. Now, for my questions: when Qui-Gon died, why did his body not disappear like Yoda's, Obi-Wan's and

Letter from Littleton

FIRST OF ALL, I WANTED TO THANK YOU for your part in the Star Wars Celebration. My sister, Krysti DeHoff, is a Columbine student, and the past month-and-a-half have been the hardest of my life—the Celebration provided a much-needed bright spot. I cannot express to you how badly I needed it. Lucasfilm and the *Insider* made the correct decision in continuing the convention as planned. It helped me—and many others touched by the tragedy—get back on track.

I wrote the following yesterday, on the six-week anniversary of the tragedy. I am a writer by nature, and writing has always been a very emotional experience for me. Perhaps that's why I've been avoiding it—this piece is the first I've done since April 20. It was hard, but I think it helped. I would appreciate it if you would take a look at it and let me know what you think.

LIZ DeHOFF Littleton, CO

I was a child again.

As those mythical blue letters—"A long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away...."—faded from view, leaving the theater darkened and the audience breathless with anticipation, I could feel the tentacles of adulthood loosen their grip on my soul. When, finally, the yellow Star Wars logo burst onto the screen, the familiar fanfare blasting from the THX-certified sound system, I broke free. Here, at last, was my chance to return fully to the galaxy far, far away, in which children are not gunned down at school, in which the violence is justified and sanitized. In the end, the good guys will always prevail.

Or so I thought. In *The Phantom Menace*, the good guys do triumph in the battle—but the audience is left with the distinct impression that evil will win the war. We feel a chill as young Anakin Skywalker, who will fall to the dark side and become Darth Vader, is introduced to the mentor he will later strike down. We shiver when the future Emperor puts his hand on Anakin's shoulder and says, "We will watch your career with great interest." We smile as the inhabitants of the planet Naboo celebrate their victory over the forces of darkness—and then we realize that the victory is hollow, and that that the villains have gained the upper hand.

Adulthood has reclaimed my heart.

I can still watch the film as a child. I laugh at Obi-Wan Kenobi's snide comments and sigh like a teenaged girl at a showing of *Titanic* whenever he does that split kick. I admire the kindness and wisdom of Qui-Gon. I cheer when Anakin wins the race. And if I'm drunk enough, I can even giggle at Jar Jar.

Try as I might, however, I cannot escape the underlying darkness. As Anakin's dream of freedom comes true, I have to wonder: if he had stayed on Tatooine, would he have fallen to the dark side? Would so many people have died at his hands? What would have happened if Qui-Gon, rather than Obi-Wan, had trained him? There are too many possibilities, too many loose ends. In short, it's too close to reality. Star Wars has not changed, but I have—in truth, reality is now too close to me.

It has been ever since April 20, when 15 people—14 of them children—died at my sister's high school, just a few blocks from where I grew up. Down the street is the pool where I learned to swim with four-year-old Dylan Klebold, a nice, freckle-faced boy who would grow up to be a killer. How could Jake Lloyd's adorable character become the most feared and hated villain in the galaxy? For me, the question is no longer abstract.

I can still be a kid during the space battles and the Podrace. At home, on my 27-inch Sony, I can let go of adulthood once more when Luke Skywalker blows up the Death Star. But I can no longer escape the powerful metaphor beneath this epic adventure.

Life is hard. Victory may come, but it has a high price. This is an unpleasant lesson to learn, but there is no getting past it. The good guys don't always triumph, even when it looks as if they have. All we can do is work hard and hope that destiny is on our side. The wrongs of the past can never be righted, but we can dedicate our lives to seeing that those wrongs are not repeated.

Star Wars is tough love. It doesn't sugarcoat the fact that life can be (and often is) painful. It does, however, offer its audience the same message that can be found in the Bible, the Greek myths, and in the tales of the Brothers Grimm: Do what you can. Never give up. And don't ever stop believing that the good guys will win in the end.

Thank you, George, for reminding me.

Anakin Skywalker's? Secondly, I thought Obi-Wan was trained by Yoda, but in the movie, Qui-Gon appeared to have tutored him. Does anyone know what the deal is with that? You guys have the best magazine and information source about Star Wars around.

JACOB KNUDSEN
Sioux Falls, SD

Jacob, Obi-Wan has been under the tutelage of the Jedi Council, which Yoda leads, since his infancy, so Yoda had ample time to train Kenobi before Qui-Gon took him as his Padawan learner. As for Qui-Gon's noble end, I wondered the same thing, and asked

George Lucas. Turn to page 18 for his answer.

I JUST GOT BACK from seeing Episode I. At the end, what is the glowing ball Queen Amidala gives to Boss Nass?

BRYCE MILLER
East Lansing, MI

Bryce, it's called the *Globe of Peace*—basically a supercool peace offering from the Naboo to the Gungans.

A BIG THANK YOU to George, the cast and crew, and everyone who made *The Phantom Menace* a glorious reality. This movie doesn't

just entertain us—it inspires us! As for accusations of "type" surrounding *Phantom Menace*, here's another take on the subject. We are the parents of two children. We firmly believe in the power of literacy to enrich their lives, and are committed to helping them become avid readers. If they show an interest in something, we do our best to find them age-appropriate books. Both of our children are big fans of the new movie, so we were especially pleased to find *Phantom Menace* movie tie-in books for children on the market.

These books not only capture the special magic of the new movie,

but they are also creatively executed and extremely well-written at reading levels that don't insult our children's intelligence. Our children are devouring these books—and we are more than pleased to let them. It is exciting to watch children want to read. From our point of view, if these books are part of the "type," we will be glad to take more of it. These books have motivated at least two young people to read. In our opinion, there can be no higher compliment to Mr. Lucas and his movie phenomenon.

MR. & MRS.
DAVID JENNY & FAMILY
Gross Creek, IN

Star Wars Celebration »An Historic Event

I HAD A GREAT TIME at the convention! I hope you plan something like this again in 2002. Just be sure to book a larger place! May the Force be with you!

BETH ROBINSON Gladstone, MI

Beth, you pretty much capitalized the mail we got about the Star Wars Celebration in Denver. Readers mostly said they had a great time but nailed us for lines, overcrowding, and, well, read for yourself...

THIS REBEL was very disappointed with the Star Wars Celebration. In fact, I think it's fair to say I feel totally cheated. I would like to quote Jon Bradley Snyder's "From the Editor's Desk" (*Star Wars Insider* #42): "Although autographs are great, too many fan conventions are just about long lines and autographs." Well, as I came to find out, the Star Wars Celebration was all about long lines—and I don't think standing outside in the rain for three-to-five hours to see anything is much of a celebration either.

I also wanted to say that I had a much better time camping out for tickets at the Continental Theater than I did waiting in line for nothing at the Star Wars Celebration. The line that formed at the theater was a real celebration by fans, for fans. Besides, it produced something in the end: tickets to go see what all this is about in the first place.

ANDY MAJORS Sedalia, CO

I would like to congratulate all of you on the incredible job you did hosting the Celebration earlier this

month. That was like Disneyland for Star Wars fans. I got to meet other fans from other states, and start what I am sure will be lifelong friendships. I am sure that there will be other Celebrations in anticipation of Episodes II and III, right? Keep up the fantastic job on Star Wars Insider! The Force is truly with you!

KIAN TAVAKOLI Napa, CA

THE CELEBRATION was great, and what was even better was the fact that it took place in Denver. It took me a little over an hour to get there, and there I was at one of the most highly-anticipated (by me) events I've ever been to. I just loved the fact that everyone there was a Star Wars fan/fanatic/collector/etc. It was like our own little tiny country for three days, where everyone shared a bond—everyone came together for Star Wars! Thanks to all of you at the Insider who put your time and effort into creating an event that could bring so many fans together to Celebrate!

JASON WILHITE
Colorado Springs, CO

JEDI POP QUIZ: what has more mud than Dagobah, lines longer than a Super Star Destroyer, yet still binds the galaxy of fans together just like the Force? Answer: the Star Wars Celebration!

I really enjoyed myself, as did my wife and two sons. I just have a few comments: the place the event was held seemed too small for the amount of fans attending. The Jar Jar Jam should have been included in the price of tickets. There should be a

best fan costume contest. The event should be held more toward summer—you know, less rain, more sun? And finally, the hotels should have been either closer or provide a free bus shuttle to the event and airport.

Other than those things, I had an excellent time and hope to see this become an annual event!

JEFF ALLRED Vancouver, WA

Jeff, for what it's worth, some hotels did offer free shuttle service to the Celebration. And we really didn't think it was going to rain—honest!

MY UNCLE AND I wanted to personally thank you for the tremendous role you played in making the Celebration something we will always cherish. I hope that plans are being made for another because I wish that my brother can experience such a great event. Rick McCallum was even gracious enough to stop his car and sign "May the Force be with you" for me. The Celebration will be a truly wonderful memory. Even the original Dack stopped in the retail tent to talk. The one regret I have is not being able to get my picture taken with either one because we did not anticipate our good fortune! Thank you again everyone that made the weekend possible.

MICHAEL STESSMAN Blair, NE

I WAS 9 IN 1977 and grew up on Star Wars. Playing with the toys and action figures was some of the most fun I had. As I grew up and married, Star Wars became just a really good movie that I would

watch about once a year or so. It wasn't until I had a child that I was to rediscover the wonder of the movies. I didn't try to get my son to like Star Wars—he just did. At age two-and-a-half he wanted to see the films over and over, and I soon broke into my vault of action figures for him. The value of my antique toys was nothing compared to the fun he had playing with them.

When the *Special Edition* came around, I had the extreme pleasure of taking my son to the re-releases in the theater. We had such a thrill together seeing the fans dressed up in costumes, and cheering on the movie. Through my son I've been able to remember what Star Wars meant to me.

After a little consideration, we got on a plane (a first for both of us), and came to Denver for the Celebration. Though the rain and crowds made it impossible for us to meet any of the actors, we had the best time seeing the X-wing and getting pictures with all the wonderful fans who dressed up for the event. A special thanks to Mike Rex, who displayed extreme patience teaching my four-year-old how to draw the new C-3PO, and Scott Chernoff, who took a lot of interest in his work.

We couldn't do anything about the horrendous weather, but like the re-releases, the best thing about the event was gathering together with so many other fans. Everyone was great, and we had a lot of fun. Thanks for everything.

CHRIS NESS Schouburg, IL

CELEBRATION NOT BLESSED WITH BLESSED

by Scott Chernoff

"I WAS SO DISAPPOINTED TO MISS the Celebration! Please send my apologies to all the fans!"

Those were the words of actor Brian Blessed, best known to *Phantom Menace* fans as Gungan leader Boss Nass, a few weeks after the *Star Wars* Celebration he was forced to miss due to "a slight touch of frostbite and a complete loss of voice" following his latest adventure, an expedition to the magnetic North Pole.

Blessed, whose devotion to both exploration and the *Star Wars* saga was detailed in *Insider* #43, had planned on traveling to Denver straight from the North Pole and taking the stage still wearing all of his gear. His last-minute withdrawal from the festivities was a surprise, given the beloved actor's enthusiasm for all things *Star Wars*. But as disappointed as fans and event organizers were with his absence, it seems nobody was more upset than Blessed himself.



BRIAN BLESSED, THE OLDEST MAN TO REACH MAGNETIC NORTH POLE, WITH THE FIRST TWO WOMEN TO MAKE THE TREK.

"I'm so glad you called," he enthused from his home in England shortly after his recovery. "I thought you might never forgive me! I wanted so much to be there. I'm all right now, completely healed, and just so sorry I had to miss the Celebration!"

Of course, we forgave him — after all, this is the one and only Boss Nass, and anyway, who could blame him for canceling due to illness? Far from not forgiving him, the *Insider* and fans at the Celebration were concerned for Blessed's health. Luckily, he's fine — but his worst days unfortunately coincided with his scheduled appearances at the Celebration.

Yet despite the difficulties, Blessed said the mission was a success. "I was the oldest man ever to go to the magnetic North Pole—but I did get there," he said. "The expedition took 30 days; there was another one that turned back after five hours. We had to have guns, unfortunately, so that we could shoot over the heads of polar bears that would come at us in the night. That was the only other life we saw for 30 days. We wouldn't shoot at them, just over them. It was 30 to 70 degrees below zero, and the winds were so fierce and harsh. Everyone got frostbite—everyone. I got a bit of frostbite on my hands and feet, and I lost my voice," he said, adding with knowing understatement, "That was difficult."

While his *Star Wars* fans were braving the rain in Denver, Blessed was recovering in a UK hospital. "I had to spend three days in a pressurized chamber," he said. (Luckily, Rick McCallum and Warwick Davis volunteered to fill Blessed's slots at the Celebration, and did so with enthusiasm.)

The actor's perilous trek to the top of the world will be televised in America on the Discovery Channel in the documentary, *Magnetic Pole*. And despite his setbacks, Blessed remains undaunted. "We really embraced the mystery," he proclaimed. But he did have one obvious regret: "How was the event? I had three days of absolute dejection for missing it."

Don't worry about Blessed, though — he's completely recovered and back to hopscotching all over the world. "I'm going to L.A. next week for the premiere of *Torzan*," he said excitedly of the animated film in which he voices Clayton, the villain. The actor was also looking forward to seeing *The Phantom Menace* for the first time, asking, "How is the film? I hear it's doing tremendously well!"

The movie is doing tremendously well—and luckily, so is Brian Blessed. ☺

and watched a giant Naboo starfighter constructed before their eyes with more than 20,000 Lego building blocks. "No glue," a Lego lady told everyone.

Many of the fans enjoying the Celebration came dressed as their favorite characters, with Darth Maul an early favorite among costumed fans, along with old staples like Vader, Fett, and the entire Rogue Squadron. One creative fan came dressed as the original Kenner action figure of Darth Vader — complete with vinyl cape and telescoping orange lightsaber extending from his sleeve.

There were many multi-generation *Star Wars* fans at the Celebration, parents who saw the original trilogy as kids and now are bringing their own families to the series.

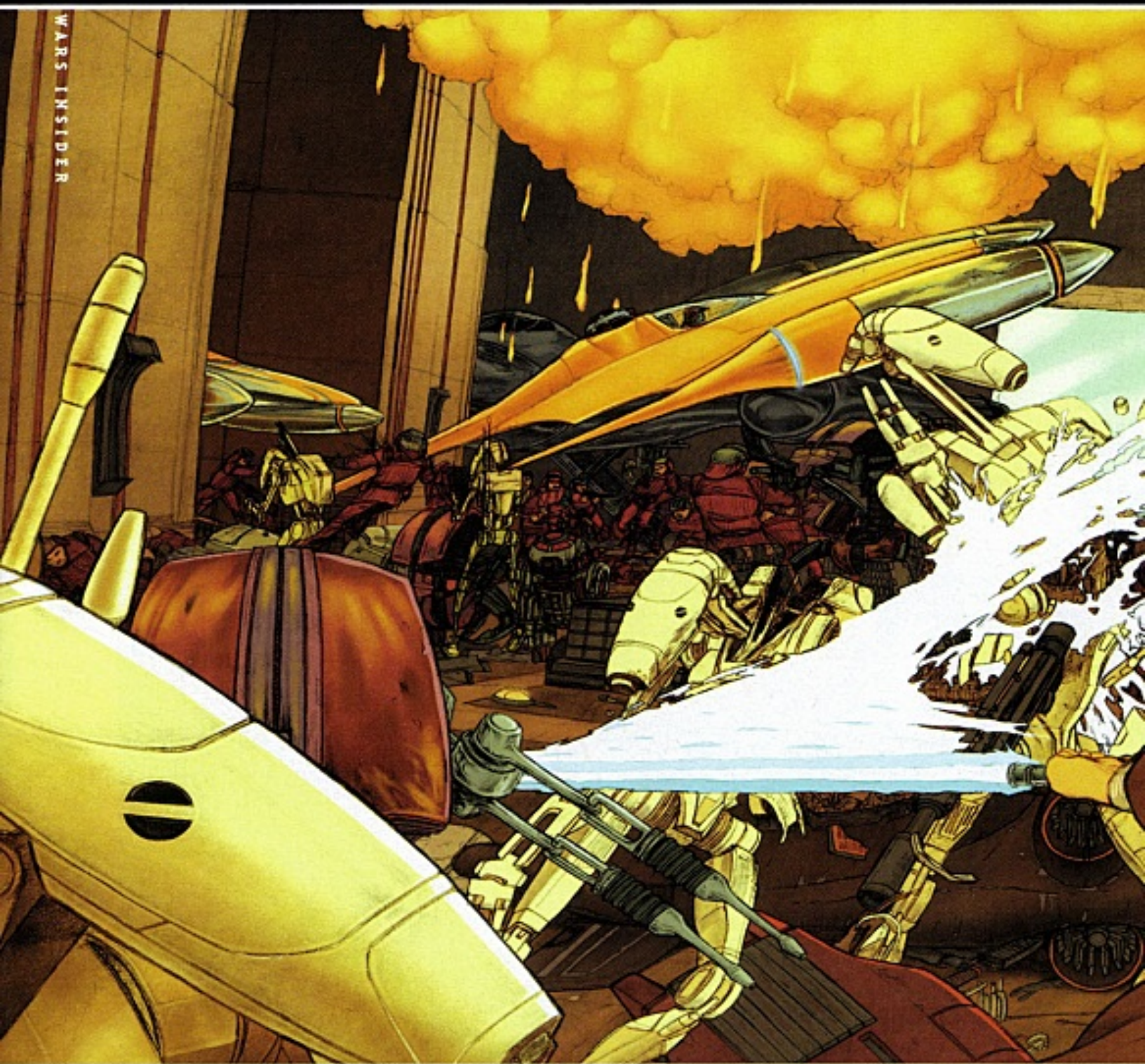
"Austin (4) likes Luke, Danielle (6) likes Leia," said Scott Honas, 33, from Arvada, Colorado. "We collect all the figures, own all the movies, watched them numerous times, he has the comic books. We just love *Star Wars*. It's the same good-bad story that's been through history since the beginning of time. You can look at it as King Arthur with Camelot, same story just a different twist. It appeals to everyone."

MANY FANS FLEW ACROSS THE WORLD to Denver for the weekend, including such far-flung locales as Spain, Australia, Germany, and Finland, as well as a French documentary film crew. Fans also came from all over the United States. New Yorkers Michael Cruz and Heather Kunzer were on a mission at the Celebration. Kunzer, a retail store manager in Manhattan, was eight months pregnant with their first child, and the couple was fishing for baby names.

"*Star Wars* has had a big influence on my life since I was a child, and we're looking for a strong and powerful name that not everyone has," father-to-be Cruz said. "Right now, the names in the running for a girl would be a combination of Queen Amidala and her handmaiden, Padmé." Since this interview was done, Michael and Heather are now the proud parents of a baby girl named Ariela (character from *Tales of the Mos Eisley Cantina*) Ashla (term for the light side of the Force from an early *Star Wars* script) Naberrie (from Episode I) Cruz (Michael's last name). Ariela was born June 27th, 1999.

As the weekend drew to a close, attendees could see that the biggest *Star Wars* fan event ever only left them with one thing to do: wait two more weeks for Episode I. Some went home with action figures and T-shirts, others just memories. Whatever they took home, everyone had one thing to share: special memories of a truly landmark event in movie history.

Senior Writer Kevin Fitzpatrick resides in New York City, where he is on the staff of Nickelodeon. He last wrote about "Lucasfilm Lifers" in *Insider* No. 43.



» This stunning illustration was done by Australian artist Matthew Meyer, including creating the mascot characters for the 2000 Australian Summer Games. To submit your own work, write to: "LAST PAGE," c/o *Star Wars Insider*. NOT SEND ARTWORK WITHOUT GETTING GUIDELINES FROM US FIRST.



Hatton. Hatton has done extensive design and illustration work, former Olympics. If you've got an idea for this page, or would like to r, P.O. Box 111000, Aurora, CO 80042, for submission guidelines. DO

Queen Amidala 1999 Portrait Edition.

The jewel of the galaxy has arrived.

Savor the magic of *Star Wars: Episode I*, with these finely crafted Portrait Edition dolls. Officially authorized by Lucasfilm Ltd., Queen Amidala is vividly brought to life in this exclusive collection. Through detailed sculpting, rich fabric, and choice accessories, she emanates a timeless quality that embodies true royalty.

Dressed in her Red Senate Crown, Queen Amidala wears a textured, crushed red-velvet robe embossed with rosettes and a golden, triple-braided soutache. Beneath lies a gown of iridescent vermillion and two tiers of accordion pleats, while jeweled golden bands, tassels, and ornamented crimson lanterns accent her hair.

Queen Amidala's Black Travel Crown includes a black panne velvet robe and a golden tricot bodice yoke that highlights ebony lace overlay sleeves and skirt. A satin finish head dress with black feathers, filigree ear coverings, and a golden metal and ruby-red forehead necklace completes this exotic look.



Dolls shown smaller than actual height of 12 inches and do not stand alone.
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